Security Council

Sixty-sixth year

Provisional

6636th meeting

Monday, 24 October 20[illegible]15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Ogwu	(Nigeria)
Members:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Messone
	Germany	Mr. Berger
	India	Mr. Ahamed
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Gumbi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh, Cuba, Ecuador, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Maldives, Malaysia, Morocco, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Turkey, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 20 October 2011 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2011/653 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council that will be held on Monday, 24 October 2011, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Abdou Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Pascoe.

Mr. Pascoe: On 18 October, Israel and Hamas implemented the first stage of a prisoner exchange agreement. Israeli Sergeant Gilad Shalit, held in Gaza without international access since 25 June 2006, was released by Hamas. Four hundred and seventy-seven Palestinian prisoners — many of whom had been imprisoned for involvement in attacks on Israelis — were released, mostly to Gaza, but also to the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the occupied Syrian Golan and Israel proper. Forty-two prisoners were released to Turkey, Qatar, Syria and Jordan. In all, 205 prisoners were transferred, in accordance with the exchange agreement, to locations other than their residence before detention.

In their public remarks following the exchange, Hamas officials unfortunately and unacceptably lauded violent resistance, and some of the released prisoners made deplorable statements glorifying acts of violence. Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that Israel would continue to fight terrorism.

Approximately 5,000 Palestinians remain in Israeli prisons. A further 550 of these are to be released within two months in the second phase of the exchange agreement. Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails suspended a hunger strike the day before the prisoner exchange, following the reported agreement of the Israeli authorities to end solitary confinement. We continue to follow closely the security, political and human rights dimensions of the prisoner issue.

The Secretary-General, who had long called for an end of the unacceptable captivity of Gilad Shalit and for the release of Palestinian prisoners, welcomed the releases as a significant humanitarian breakthrough. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process actively supported channels of dialogue throughout that period. We reiterate the Secretary-General's thanks to Egypt for its contribution to this outcome, and to Germany for its efforts.

We have seen political will brought to bear to resolve a humanitarian issue, as well as a readiness in that context to take difficult decisions. We call for the same determination to be displayed with regard to the most important issue, namely, the quest for a lasting peace. The parties must rise to that challenge.

The Quartet statement of 23 September provides a framework for the parties to find a way forward. We welcome the separate meetings, expected to be held on 26 October, among negotiators from each side and Quartet envoys and the Quartet representative to agree on a method for proceeding in the negotiation. Special Coordinator Serry will participate in those meetings, and is in close dialogue with the parties in preparation for them. We remind the parties that the Quartet reaffirmed the international legal basis for peace talks and called for the parties to overcome the obstacles and resume negotiations without preconditions. The Quartet further called for proposals within three months on borders and security, with a view to achieving substantial progress within six months and an agreement no later than the end of 2012. The Quartet stressed the need for the parties to refrain from provocations and reiterated their Road Map obligations.

In that regard, we have registered our deep concern at Israel's settlement actions. The Israeli announcement of 1,100 East Jerusalem settlement units on the day that the Council last met was followed by the announcement, on 10 October, of 11 new housing units in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Pisgat Zeev. On 11 October, the Israeli authorities significantly advanced plans for the construction of approximately 2,600 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Givat Hamatos, which would amount to a new settlement in an area of vital importance for the viability of a two-State outcome.

The Israeli authorities are also not acting effectively against the construction of illegal outposts on private Palestinian land. On 14 October, the Secretary-General made clear that those developments were unacceptable and ran counter to the Quartet's call and Israel's commitments under the Road Map. I would remind the Council that settlement activity is illegal under international law and should cease. Unilateral actions on the ground will not be recognized by the international community.

At the same time, restrictions continue on land allocation and planning for Palestinian construction in Area C and East Jerusalem. Demolitions by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Area C during the reporting period displaced 145 people, including 81 children. We remain concerned at plans to relocate approximately 2,300 Bedouins in the vicinity of the so-called "E-1 corridor", connecting East Jerusalem to West Bank settlements.

The Palestinian application for United Nations membership is being examined by the Security Council, and is a matter for Member States. Also, the Palestinian request for membership in UNESCO is being reviewed before a vote by the General Conference. That step could have repercussions for the organization, as it has legal and political implications for the funding provided by some Member States. The Secretary-General is increasingly concerned about ramifications of such a step for the United Nations as a whole, and asks all involved to act wisely in determining a course of action. Regardless of those developments, a negotiated two-State solution, to which both leaders are committed, must remain the highest priority.

In the West Bank, both the application for statehood and the prisoner release evoked significant public demonstrations, but few acts of violence. Demonstrations against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line, in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, also largely remained peaceful. Coordination between the parties remains essential to maintain a secure environment.

However, tensions and violent incidents continue. Settler attacks on Palestinians resulted in one death and 19 injuries, including to five Palestinian children. Violent settlers especially targeted Palestinians harvesting their olive groves, and damaged 664 trees. Settlers also attacked an IDF patrol vehicle on 5 October, resulting in light injuries to an Israeli soldier. I urge the Israeli authorities to take decisive actions against acts of violence perpetrated by Israeli citizens. I also note that, on 3 October in Israel, a mosque was set on fire in the Upper Galilee village of Tuba Zangaria. That triggered unrest, vandalism and the arrest of local residents, as well as the subsequent desecration of Muslim, Christian and Jewish holy sites and property in several towns in Israel.

Palestinian attacks on Israelis in the occupied West Bank resulted in two injuries, including the stabbing of an Israeli child on 22 October, as well as extensive material damage, mostly from stones and Molotov cocktails thrown at Israeli vehicles. On 6 October, hundreds of Israeli pilgrims accompanied by the IDF in the Palestinian city of Nablus discovered swastikas painted on the exterior walls of Joseph's Tomb. On the same day, Israeli authorities arrested five Palestinians in connection with the stoning of a vehicle travelling in the West Bank on 23 September, which caused the death of the Israeli driver and his infant son.

Turning to Gaza, in spite of the fragile relative calm, six indiscriminate rockets and 13 mortar shells were fired by Palestinian militants into Israel during this reporting period, while two IDF incursions and five air strikes resulted in injuries to three Palestinian militants and two Palestinian civilians. We call for an end to militant rocket fire into Israel, maximum Israeli restraint and respect by all parties for international humanitarian law.

I echo the Secretary-General's expressed hope that the prisoner exchange will be followed by more far-reaching steps to end the closure of Gaza. Those steps should be taken within the framework of the full implementation of resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), and in close coordination with the Palestinian Authority.

In spite of the recent economic growth and the drop in unemployment in Gaza, the sustainability of that progress is unclear. Significant parts of the population remain food insecure and rely on humanitarian assistance. While agencies are implementing approved projects, ongoing restrictions limit the ability of the United Nations to support Gaza's economic recovery and reconstruction. There is a worrisome humanitarian and development vacuum that is being filled by other actors, fuelled by an illicit tunnel trade largely controlled by the de facto authorities.

That situation presents genuine concerns with regard to prospects for the emergence of a viable Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza, and deepens the Palestinian divide. We reiterate our call on Israel for more far-reaching steps to ease its land closures and facilitate the entry of construction materials into Gaza, exports and the free movement of people in both directions, with due consideration for Israel's legitimate security concerns. We also reiterate our call for weapons smuggling to be brought under control.

Notwithstanding inter-factional contacts, there has been no concrete progress towards the further implementation of the May reconciliation agreement. We reiterate our support for Palestinian reconciliation within the framework of Quartet principles, Palestinian Liberation Organization commitments and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Turning to Lebanon, I am pleased to report that the situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has remained generally quiet and stable. UNIFIL recorded no major incidents or violations, except for continuing Israeli overflights of Lebanese airspace on an almost daily basis. I will not go into detail, as the Security Council will hear more in-depth briefings on Lebanon in the coming weeks.

Lebanon of course continues to be affected by developments in neighbouring Syria. In several instances during the month of October, the Syrian army opened fire across the border, carried out incursions into Lebanon and raided houses to capture fleeing nationals and army deserters. On 6 October, Syrian troops killed a Syrian national on Lebanese soil. The United Nations continues to coordinate closely with the Government of Lebanon on the provision of assistance to the displaced Syrian nationals who crossed into Lebanon fleeing violence, as well as on matters of protection and the determination of their status.

Those developments reflect the continuing political and human rights crisis in Syria, which has led to the deaths of more than 3,000 people since March. Unfortunately, signs are that the face-off between the regime and the opposition will continue, with all of the negative consequences for Syria and the region. This is of great concern to the United Nations. The Secretary-General continues to call on the Syrian leadership to take urgent action to stop the killing. He also continues to emphasize the need for the international community to act in a coherent manner to prevent further bloodshed. In that regard, we note that the League of Arab States met on 16 October to discuss the situation in Syria. The Arab League called for dialogue and established a follow-up committee. Its ministerial delegation will travel to Damascus on 26 October.

Turning back to the Israeli-Palestinian peace, let me conclude by emphasizing our deep concern at the impasse between the parties and its potential implications for the future. Leadership is urgently needed and the moderate Palestinian leadership must be supported. The parties must refrain from provocation and should stand ready to offer serious proposals on borders and security for negotiation. We urge them to approach their meetings with the Quartet envoys later this week in that spirit. Otherwise, the impasse will only deepen, and with it, the level of confrontation and the scale of mistrust. The international community must stand ready to play an active role in helping to steer the situation towards an agreement that resolves all final status issues, ends the occupation that began in 1967, ends the conflict and creates an independent and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel within secure and recognized borders.

The President: I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing. I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Palestine congratulates Nigeria on its skilled stewardship of the Security Council this month. We also express appreciation to Lebanon for its efficient presidency in September, including its responsible handling of Palestine's application for United Nations membership, which was conveyed to the Council on 23 September by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (see S/2011/592).

I also reiterate our appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing and for all the efforts being carried out by the Department of Political Affairs, including by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, on behalf of the Secretary-General.

Palestine would like to convey its condolences to the people and Government of Turkey on the losses resulting from the earthquake that recently struck the country. We would also like to convey our condolences to the people and Government of Saudi Arabia on the death of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

We meet in this debate at a historic moment, when the Security Council is considering the application submitted by Palestine for admission as a Member State of the United Nations (S/2011/592). It is a moment long overdue in the tragic history of the Palestinian people and this prolonged conflict. And it is a moment requiring Council members to demonstrate the utmost responsibility in upholding their Charter duties and their legal obligations with regard to the question of Palestine, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

We believe that it would not be overstating the case to say that the Palestinian people, the peoples of the region and virtually the entire international community have joined in an appeal to the Council at this moment to do justice by Palestine and fulfil its role in the attainment of a just, comprehensive and lasting solution that will finally make peace and security a reality between Palestine and Israel and throughout the Middle East.

We reflect today on that which has brought us to this stage in our long quest to realize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and achieve a peaceful solution to the conflict. To date, 130 countries have recognized the State of Palestine. Those countries have taken a principled stand in support of our people's right to self-determination and in line with countless United Nations resolutions, from resolution 181 (II) of 1947 to the present. We are grateful for their recognition and support, which constitute an investment in peace consistent with the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, a solution that is internationally supported and endorsed.

At the same time, over the past two years, we have seen significant progress in the building and strengthening of Palestinian national institutions with the implementation of the Palestinian Authority's two-year plan to prepare our institutions and infrastructure for the independence of our State. It is a massive project, undertaken with the strong support and funding of countries from around the globe. Despite the many obstacles and the dysfunction caused by the Israeli occupation, this project has been a success, as affirmed by international institutions and as recently reflected in the 18 September conclusions of the Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, which reaffirmed that we are able to govern ourselves with viable, effective institutions that are above the threshold for a functioning State.

In addition to those two processes, we have witnessed the repeated and regrettable failures of the peace process. For nearly two decades, the negotiations undertaken by the Palestinian leadership in a spirit of historic compromise and good faith have been undermined, obstructed and stalled as a direct result of Israel's intransigence, its egregious violations of international law and human rights and its refusal to commit to the most basic principles and parameters essential for the achievement of a just and lasting peace.

The consequences of its actions have not, however, been borne by the occupying Power, which continues to act with total impunity. Instead, they have been borne by generations of Palestinians, who continue to suffer the hardships of ongoing dispossession and exile and the brutality of the Israeli occupation in all of its manifestations; by the region, which continues to suffer from the insecurity and turmoil generated by this conflict; and by the international community, which continues to feel the wide-ranging impact of tensions and instability in the region and which continues, to no avail, to expend vast efforts and resources to resolve the conflict and alleviate its consequences.

All of those dynamics have led us to this moment — a moment in which we insist that international law and the relevant resolutions, including those of the Security Council, be upheld and that the status quo no longer be maintained, for it is unacceptable, illogical and unjust. That is what brought President Mahmoud Abbas to the United Nations on 23 September (see A/66/PV.19) with the application of the State of Palestine for admission as a Member State and his historic statement to the General Assembly on that day. Here, we express our deep appreciation to the United Nations Secretary-General and the Legal Counsel for verifying Palestine's application and conveying it without question to the Security Council for its consideration. We believe that this reflects the strength of Palestine's application and its fulfilment of the required criteria for this important step.

The Council has been debating our application for nearly a month, which we believe is sufficient time for its thorough consideration. We are aware of the deliberations taking place in the Committee on the Admission of New Members and express our gratitude for the principled positions of support affirmed by many delegations.

We also express appreciation for the efforts of the Non-Aligned Movement caucus of the Council in addressing this issue. It is time for the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities by approving our application and making a positive recommendation to the General Assembly for Palestine's admission to membership. That would be the most just and appropriate outcome of this process. We reiterate our belief that actions undertaken at the United Nations, the centre of multilateral activity in our world, can and must contribute towards the peace we all seek and will not obstruct the realization of this objective.

Of course, we are aware of the difficulties, but we cannot accept attempts to extend or postpone this exercise indefinitely at the expense of the merits of Palestine's application and its long overdue and rightful inclusion in the community of nations. We believe that this exercise should be brought to closure with a clear outcome. In this regard, we stress that we see no contradiction between the possibility of a resumption of negotiations between the two sides, which the Quartet is seeking to arrange, and the Security Council's responsible consideration of Palestine's application. In fact, these processes, which share the objective of actualizing the two-State solution of Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, should be viewed as mutually reinforcing.

Palestine's recent efforts, including President Abbas's speech before the General Assembly and the submission of our application, have contributed to a growing momentum that underscores the urgency of bringing an end to the occupation that began in 1967. It is time for the Palestinian people to live in freedom and dignity and for a new era of peace and security to prevail in our region. That momentum, which led to the introduction of the French proposal by President Nicolas Sarkozy (see A/66/PV.11) and to the 23 September statement by the Quartet, has given added impetus to Governments and civil society worldwide to bolster their support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people at this critical time.

The Palestinian leadership's core understanding of the Quartet statement is that negotiations are to commence on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders and that Israel is expected to meet its legal obligations, including those under the Road Map, to halt all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Clearly, no credible peace process can proceed in the absence of such a basic understanding. If the Quartet succeeds in securing a commitment from the Israeli side on this basis, then the Palestinian side is willing to resume negotiations in accordance with the agreed terms of reference reflected in the resolutions of this Council, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

Here, we reiterate that there is no contradiction between resuming negotiations in this framework and the Palestinian efforts to become a State Member of the United Nations. This is particularly clear, since the two-State solution enjoys global consensus and the aim of both processes is the long overdue independence of the Palestinian State — a right denied for over 63 years since partition — and the achievement of a just and lasting peace.

The current reality of the Israeli occupation and the situation of the Palestinian Authority cannot be sustained. Israel cannot continue to exploit and benefit from the occupation without consequences, absolved of its responsibilities as an occupying Power. Either the current situation must change, or Israel must assume full responsibility as the occupying Power. I would like to repeat that. Either the current situation must change, or Israel must assume full responsibility as the occupying Power. The status quo cannot be maintained as we move forward, for it is absolutely untenable.

Indeed, the situation on the ground continues to worsen and tensions continue to rise. In the midst of the serious diplomatic efforts being exerted by all concerned parties, Israel has instead intensified its illegal settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, gobbling up more Palestinian land with its construction and expansion of settlements and the wall, destroying more Palestinian homes and properties and displacing more Palestinian families, as well as permitting the terror rampages of the Israeli settlers against our civilians, their homes, their lands and trees, and their mosques. Such actions by Israel must be seen for what they are: a concrete, negative reaction to the efforts of the international community, including the Quartet, in favour of its occupation and expansionist annexation agenda.

How else can one explain the provocative and arrogant declarations in just the past three weeks regarding the construction of nearly 4,000 more settlement units? How else can one explain the deliberate planning and expansion of settlements and the attempts to entrench settlement outposts through legislation, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem and Bethlehem? All these measures are severing the northern and southern parts of the West Bank, encircling occupied East Jerusalem and separating it from its natural Palestinian environs, and totally undermining the contiguity and viability of our State. There is no justification for those illegal Israeli measures and no explanation for them other than that this Israeli Government is interested in neither the two-State solution nor in peace and security, and that it has chosen instead to continue its occupation and subjugation of an entire nation of people and to prolong the conflict.

That obstruction of peace has also been underscored recent days by the occupying Power's intensification of the mistreatment and abuse of the thousands of Palestinian civilians who remain imprisoned in its jails and detention centres. In a series of letters, we have drawn the Council's attention to their plight, including the hunger strike that began on 27 September, and we call on it to uphold international law vis-à-vis the situation of our prisoners. The international community, including the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, must demand that Israel comply with its legal obligations and cease its abuse of Palestinian prisoners — who include hundreds of children, some as young as 12 years old — and that the International Committee of the Red Cross be given unfettered access to them. In that regard, the recent prisoner exchange was a very important development. We welcome the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and await the release of the thousands of others who continue to unjustly languish in Israeli prisons.

Yet another unsustainable situation is the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has inflicted so much suffering on the Palestinian civilian population. All pretexts for continuing that illegal blockade must be rejected. The international community must unanimously demand that Israel fully lift the blockade and allow the sustained and unfettered movement of persons and goods into and out the Gaza Strip in order to permit the reconstruction of destroyed homes, properties and infrastructure, as well as the rehabilitation of our society there, which has been so damaged by that vicious form of collective punishment by the occupying Power.

The Palestinian leadership remains committed to peace and to negotiating seriously all final-status issues — the Palestine refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, security and water — when the appropriate environment is secured. However, we will not enter into negotiations for the sake of negotiations. The situation on the ground and the two-State solution itself are too fragile to withstand further delays and sabotage. Israel, the occupying Power, must be speedily compelled to commit to negotiations along the clear parameters to which we have already committed.

While committed to the peace process, we must reiterate clearly that the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, freedom and independence is not up for negotiation, nor will it be the product of negotiations. It is an inalienable right and the sole domain of the Palestinian people. It has never been an issue for negotiations with Israel, nor will it ever be. Negotiations on the core issues and the expression of our self-determination should not be confused by Israel, or others, as one and the same, because they are not. Israel, as the occupying Power, should not be allowed to continue obstructing and dictating the terms of our exercise of that inalienable right.

We are determined to achieve that right and all of the legitimate national aspirations of our people. We are determined to bring an end to the injustice endured by our people, including the grave injustice inflicted on our refugees. We are determined to peacefully achieve the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the pre-1967 borders. That achievement will be the core of a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. We are grateful for the long-standing support of the international community in that journey, and urge that no effort be spared at this critical crossroads to make that a reality. It clearly requires that the Security Council responsibly uphold its Charter duties.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): At the outset, I would like to extend my condolences to the people of Turkey following yesterday's tragic earthquake.

Let me begin by reminding the Council that the name of today's debate is the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and not vice versa. This morning, I would like to take the unusual step of actually focusing on the situation in the Middle East. Let me assure the Council that I will give proper attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict later. However, let us first look at the facts.

The Middle East is in turmoil. Thousands of innocents have been gunned down in the street. People are calling for their freedom and demanding their rights. Yet, month after month, the Council deals disproportionately with one — and only one — conflict in the region. I do not claim that the Council is not dealing with the situation of specific countries in the Middle East. It does. However, I think that it is time to start connecting the dots so that we can face the bigger picture.

For generations, the Arab world has failed miserably to address the needs of its own people. The United Nations Development Programme has sponsored five — five— *Arab Human Development Reports* since 2002. Year after year, the Arab researchers who write the reports often offer a glimpse into the real world of the Middle East. Young people struggle without access to jobs and education. Women are denied basic rights. Free expression is repressed. Minorities are persecuted. Elections are a sham.

With their world in flames, Arab leaders continue to blame Israel and the West for all their problems. For years, it has been the only explanation that they have been able to offer to their own people. From time to time, they spice up the story. When a shark attacked a tourist in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh recently, the local Egyptian Governor suggested that Mossad was using sharks to harm Egyptian tourism. Everything wrong in the Middle East, according to many Arab leaders, is simply Israel's fault. If it is not Mossad, it is the Central Intelligence Agency, MI6 or some other foreign force.

Today, the people of the Middle East demand real answers for their plight. We have seen their brave stands in public squares. We have heard their cries. We have witnessed the deadly response to such calls for freedom. In Hama, Dara and Latakia, the Syrian regime slaughters its citizens in a desperate bid to hold onto power. Some members of the Council remain blind to Al-Assad's brutality. In Libya, the reign of Muammar Al-Qadhafi is over after more than 40 years of repression and many months of bloodshed. The Libyan despot's violent end illustrated what Churchill once described as the signal disadvantage of a dictator. What he does to others may often be done back to him. That truth haunts the minds of many leaders in our region. Al-Qadhafi's fate rings an alarm bell for them.

In Iran, an Ayatollah regime represses its own people, as it helps other tyrants to butcher theirs. Last week, United Nations Special Rapporteur Shaheed briefed the General Assembly, offering a chilling picture of what daily life in Iran looks like. His report highlighted

> "a pattern of systemic violations of … fundamental human rights … includ[ing] multifarious deficits in relation to the administration of justice … practices that amount to torture … the imposition of the death penalty in the absence of proper judicial safeguards … the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, and the erosion of civil and political rights". (*see A/66/374, para. 18*)

Iran remains the world's central banker, chief trainer and primary sponsor of terror. Recent events have shown that its State-directed terrorist activities extend from the Persian Gulf to the Washington Beltway, with targets that range from innocent protesters to foreign soldiers to official diplomatic representatives. That is the way the regime behaves today. One can only imagine what it would do with nuclear capabilities — with the dangerous combination of extremist ideology, advanced missile technology and nuclear weapons.

The reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency make clear that Iran continues to march towards the goal of a nuclear bomb in defiance of the international community. We all cannot allow it to place the entire world under the spectre of nuclear terrorism. The world must stop Iran before it is too late.

The Middle East is trembling. Its future is uncertain. Two roads stand before us. There is a future offered by Iranian and Syrian leaders of more extremism, greater violence and continued hate. Their vision will not liberate human beings. It will enslave them. It does not build. It destroys. There is another road — a path of progress, reform and moderation.

The choice before us is clear. It has never been more critical to make the right choice for the future of the Middle East and all its inhabitants. It is time for the Council to stop ignoring the destructive forces that seek to keep the Middle East in the past, so that we can seize the promise of a brighter future.

Make no mistake. It is important for Israel and the Palestinians to resolve our long-standing conflict. It is important on its own merits, so that Israelis and Palestinians alike can lead peaceful, secure and prosperous lives. But it will not produce a sudden outbreak of stability, harmony and democratization from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea. Seriously addressing the underlying problems of the Middle East will be essential to advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The road to peace can only be built on a foundation of mutual recognition and a dialogue. A month ago, President Abbas stood in this building and said,

> "I come before the General Assembly today from the Holy Land, the land of Palestine, the land of divine messages, ascension of the Prophet Muhammad and the birthplace of Jesus Christ". (*A/66/PV.19, p. 29*)

He denied 4,000 years of Jewish history. It was not a small omission. It was not an oversight. The Palestinian leadership's attempts to erase the connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel is not new. Others in the Arab world have offered a different message. In 1995, for example, King Hussein went to the United States and said,

> "For our part, we shall continue to work for the new dawn when all the children of Abraham and their descendants are living together in the birthplace of their three great monotheistic religions".

Let me repeat that King Hussein said three monotheistic religions, not one or two. Those who seek peace do not negate the narrative of the other side. On the contrary, they recognize its existence and choose to sit down and negotiate peace in good faith. That is what President Sadat did; it is what King Hussein did. The ancient Jewish bond with the land of Israel is unbreakable. This is our homeland. The United Nations recognized Israel as a Jewish State 64 years ago. It is time for the Palestinians and more than 20 Muslim countries around the globe to do the same.

Let there be no doubt, and I repeat, Israel wants peace with a future Palestinian State. In word and in deed, my Government has demonstrated time and again that we seek two States for two peoples living side by side in peace. I repeat: two States for two peoples. We do not hear that from the Palestinians or any Arab leaders. If anyone should hear the phrase "two States for two peoples", they should call me, on a 911 number if necessary, day or night.

It is no coincidence that Prime Minister Netanyahu stood here last month and issued a clear call to President Abbas (see A/66/PV.19). Today let me reiterate that call to the Palestinians. Sit down with Israel. Leave your preconditions behind. Start negotiations now. The international community has called on the Palestinians to go back to negotiations. Israel has accepted the principles outlined by the Quartet to restart negotiations immediately without preconditions. We are waiting for the Palestinians to do the same thing.

The Palestinians suggest that settlements are the core cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is an interesting assertion, considering the fact that the conflict raged for nearly half a century before a single settlement sprang up in the West Bank. From 1948 until 1967, the West Bank was part of Jordan. Gaza was part of Egypt. The Arab world did not lift a finger to create a Palestinian State, and it sought Israel's alienation when not a single settlement stood anywhere in the West Bank or Gaza. The issue of settlements will be worked out over the course of negotiations. But the primary obstacle to peace is not settlements. That is just a pretext for the Palestinians to avoid negotiations. The primary obstacle to peace is the Arab world's refusal to acknowledge the Jewish people's ancient connection to the land of Israel, and the Palestinians' insistence on the so-called right of return.

Today the Palestinian leadership is calling for an independent Palestinian State, but insists that its own people return to the Jewish State. That is a proposition that no one who believes in the right of Israel to exist could accept, because the only equation in political science with mathematical certainty is that the so-called right of return equals the destruction of the State of Israel. The idea that Israel will be flooded with millions of Palestinians is a non-starter. The international community and the Palestinian leadership know it, but the Palestinian people do not hear it. This gap between perception and reality is a major obstacle to peace. The so-called right of return is the major hurdle to achieving peace. Since the Palestinian leadership refuses to tell the Palestinian people the truth, the international community and the people around this table have a responsibility to tell the Palestinian people about the basic compromises that they will have to make.

The many issues that remain outstanding can and will be resolved only through direct negotiations between the parties. Israel's peace with Egypt was negotiated, not imposed. Peace with Jordan was negotiated, not imposed. An Israeli-Palestinian peace must be negotiated; it cannot be imposed. Palestinian unilateral action at the United Nations is no path to real statehood; it is a march of folly. Today the Palestinians are far from meeting the basic criteria for statehood, including the test of effective control. The President of the Palestinian Authority has zero authority in the Gaza Strip. Before flying 9,000 kilometres to New York to seek United Nations membership, President Abbas should have driven 50 kilometres to Gaza, which he has been unable to visit since 2007. In the same breath that they claim that the State will be peace-loving, Palestinian leaders speak of unity with Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization. Hamas and a love of peace? There is no greater contradiction in terms.

This month, on a fund-raising excursion of terrorism with his Iranian patrons, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh stood in front of an audience in Tehran and said that "the correct strategy to liberate our country and Jerusalem is violent resistance". Under Hamas rule, Gaza remains a launching ground for constant rocket attacks targeting Israeli civilians that are fuelled by a continuous flow of weapons from Iran and elsewhere. Israel has a right to defend itself. As the Palmer report made clear, the naval blockade is a legitimate security measure for preventing weapons from entering the Gaza sea.

When it is not attacking Israelis, Hamas is oppressing its own people. In Gaza, civil society is non-existent. Political opponents are tortured, women are subjugated and children are used as suicide bombers and human shields. Textbooks and television glorify martyrdom and demonize the Jews. Incitement against Israelis also continues in the West Bank, among the official institutions of the Palestinian Authority, which names its public squares after suicide bombers.

The unresolved questions about the future of a Palestinian State cannot be simply swept under the carpet. They go to the core of resolving our conflict.

They have to be addressed. Let me be clear: for Israel, the question is not whether we can accept a Palestinian State; we can. The question is what the character of the Palestinian State that emerges alongside us will be — whether it will live in peace.

Palestinian unilateral action in the United Nations breaches the Oslo Accords, the Interim Arrangements, the Paris Protocol and other bilateral agreements that form the basis of 40 spheres of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, all of which could be jeopardized by unilateral action at the United Nations. This unilateral initiative will raise expectations that cannot be met. It is a recipe for instability and, potentially, violence. Members of the international community should be clear about the responsibility: you vote for it, you own it. All those who vote for unilateral action and recognition will be responsible for its consequences. At this critical juncture, the Palestinians' true friends will encourage them to put aside the false idol of unilateralism and get back to the hard work of direct negotiations.

Speaking of friends, the many so-called Arab champions of the Palestinians' cause have a responsibility to play a constructive role. Constructive support from the Arab world is vital for building the civic and economic structures necessary for real Palestinian statehood and peace. Instead of simply adding to the cause of State-bashing, the Palestinians' true supporters will help advance State-building. Arab donors provided just 20 per cent of international funds for the Palestinian Authority's regular budget last year. Let me put this in perspective: last year Arab donations to the regular Authority budget accounted for a little more than half of what Saudi Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal spent on his newest personal luxury jet. People in Washington, London and Paris are struggling with an economic downturn, but still providing the bulk of support for Palestinian institutions, while Arab States, saturated in petrodollars, do not even give the Palestinians crumbs from the table.

In the Jewish tradition we are taught that whosoever saves a single life saves an entire universe. This sacred principle forms the backbone of Israel's democracy. It drives our Government's policy. We witnessed a clear reflection of those values last week. All of Israel welcomed home our kidnapped soldier, Gilad Shalit, after he had spent more than five years in Hamas captivity. It was a moment of great joy, but it came with tremendous costs. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General personally, and the people around him. Some of the countries represented here today played an important role in Gilad Shalit's release. For us, the supreme value of a single human life justified releasing more than 1,000 terrorists and criminals covered in the blood of innocents. The values inherent in such an act shine bright in our region. Many took note. On Twitter, one Syrian blogger, Soori Madsoos, wrote:

> "Their Government is prepared to pay the ultimate price for one citizen, while our Government kills us like we were animals, and our Arab neighbours say that it is an internal matter".

Time and again, Israel has shown that it is ready and able to make bold and courageous decisions to preserve life, to uphold human dignity and to pursue peace.

Sustainable peace must be negotiated, must be nurtured and must be anchored in security. It must take root in homes, schools and media in order to teach tolerance and understanding and thus grow within hearts and minds. It must be built on the foundation of a younger generation that understands the compromises necessary for peace. A brighter future for the Middle East must be forged from within, when we are open and honest about the challenges before us, and resolute in our determination to meet them together.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the text in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now invite the Permanent Representative of the United States of America and Member of President Obama's Cabinet, Her Excellency Ms. Susan Rice to take the floor.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing. I will begin with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The United States continues to work vigorously with the parties, the Quartet and our international partners to resume negotiations on the basis of the 23 September Quartet statement. That statement provides a clear and credible path back to the negotiating table, which is the only path to achieve the two-State solution we all seek.

The Quartet statement reaffirms President Obama's vision for peace, as laid out in his May remarks. President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu have each agreed to send negotiators to Jerusalem for preparatory meetings with the Quartet envoys on 26 October. Thus, our focus remains on laying the groundwork for these and subsequent meetings leading to the two parties' exchanging comprehensive proposals on territory and security by the end of the year, as outlined in the Quartet's timeline.

We urge all members of the Council and all Member States to unite to help to create a positive climate for resuming negotiations. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians who must live side by side. Only they can reach agreement on the painful issues that divide them: borders and security; refugees and Jerusalem. We have been very clear that we believe Palestinian efforts to seek Member State status at the United Nations will not advance the peace process, but rather will complicate, delay and perhaps derail prospects for a negotiated settlement. Therefore, we have consistently opposed such unilateral initiatives. We will continue, at the same time, to exert every effort to bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

Like every American Administration for decades, the Obama Administration does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity. The fate of existing settlements is one that must be dealt with by the parties along with other permanent status issues, including the status of Jerusalem. For that reason, steps by the Government of Israel to advance significant new construction in Givat Hamatos are deeply disappointing.

The illegal trafficking of weapons in Gaza continues to pose a serious threat to civilians in Gaza, in Israel and in Egypt. It must be stopped.

With regard to Hamas, we reaffirm the importance of fulfilling the Quartet's principle's commitment to non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist and recognition of previous agreements. We call again on Palestinians and Israelis to take constructive actions to promote peace and to avoid actions that complicate this process or undermine trust.

The United States is very pleased that Gilad Shalit has finally been reunited with his family after five long years in captivity.

I will now turn to the crisis in Syria. For more than seven months, ordinary Syrians have taken to the streets to demand respect for their most fundamental human rights. The Al-Assad regime has met those peaceful protests with brutal and escalating violence. According to the United Nations, the death toll has surpassed 3,000. It is tragic that Al-Assad's barbaric acts have recently been met by silence from this Council.

The United States welcomes the Arab League's renewed efforts to stop the violence to allow the Syrian people to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and assembly and to bring about a peaceful transition to democracy.

We are very sceptical, however, that the Al-Assad regime has any intention of allowing the opposition to meet in an environment free of intimidation. We again call for full and unfettered access by credible, professional observers, including human rights monitors, the United Nations Human Rights Council's commission of inquiry and international observers.

In addition, we strongly deplore the violent incursions and raids into Lebanon by Syrian security forces that have resulted in death and injury.

Turning to Yemen: We welcome the Council's adoption on Friday of resolution 2014 (2011) addressing the grave situation there. Each day that passes without a peaceful and orderly transition of power is another day that the Yemeni people are forced to live in danger and instability. We again urge all parties to cease violence and exercise maximum restraint. We will continue to work intensively with the international community to support the Yemeni people's aspirations for democracy and protection of their basic human rights.

We are pleased that the Government of Lebanon has reaffirmed that it will uphold Lebanon's international commitments, including Lebanon's agreement with the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. We believe it is of utmost important that Lebanon fulfil its funding obligations to the Special Tribunal within the coming weeks. We remain deeply committed to the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). The United States continues to support the Lebanese Armed Forces' ongoing efforts to assert control and maintain stability in southern Lebanon.

Finally, the United Sates congratulates the Tunisian people on the reported high turnout in Sunday's elections for a constituent assembly. This is a milestone on the Tunisian people's path from dictatorship to a democratic Government founded upon respect for the will of its citizens.

We look forward to working with the people and Government of Tunisia, including the new Constituent Assembly, over the next phase of their country's historic transition.

The President: I now invite His Excellency Mr. E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs of India, to take the floor.

Mr. Ahamed (India): At the outset, I would like to convey our deep condolences to the Government and the people of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. I would also like to convey our solidarity with the Government and the people of Turkey in dealing with the aftermath of the devastating earthquake.

First of all, I would like to thank you, Madam President, for organizing this open debate on the Middle East, a region witnessing momentous transformation. I also would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on developments in the region.

Clearly, the issue of Palestine has taken a decisive turn in the history of the Middle East conflict after President Mahmoud Abbas filed an application with the Secretary-General on 23 September for Palestine's full membership to the United Nations.

Speaking on 24 September 2011 — a day after President Abbas filed the application — my Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, said in the General Assembly that India has been steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with Israel, as per the relevant resolutions of this Organization, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map. The Prime Minister added that we look forward to welcoming Palestine as an equal Member of the United Nations (see A/66/PV.22).

India recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1975, and its Office in New Delhi was accorded full diplomatic recognition in 1980. India was the first non-Arab country to recognize the State of Palestine, in 1988. We have maintained diplomatic relations with Palestine for over two decades now. It is also pertinent to note that Palestine has been recognized by more than two thirds of the membership of this Organization.

Obviously, the State of Palestine fulfils all criteria mentioned in Article 4 of the Charter for membership to this Organization. We therefore support Palestine's application and hope that the process will be concluded expeditiously.

During my long political career, I have had the honour to work closely with Palestinian leaders. I met the undisputed leader of the Palestinian people, the late President Yasser Arafat, on 17 September 2004 at Ramallah, just a few months before he left his earthly abode. At that meeting, I had the opportunity to reiterate India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for their cause. He warmly recalled his close relations with Indian leaders, particularly Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, and appreciated India's unwavering support for the cause of the Palestinian people. We have continued our interactions with the Palestinian leadership under President Abbas. He paid state visits to India in 2008 and 2010.

As the world's largest democracy and arguably its most diverse country, India recognizes the democratic aspirations of all peoples, including those in the Middle East. The call of the international community for democracy and respect for fundamental rights will sound hollow if the present impasse continues and the Palestinians are denied their aspirations.

It is also our firm conviction that lasting peace and security in the region can be achieved only through peaceful dialogue, not through the use of force. In this context we take note of the Quartet statement of 23 September, and we hope that the timelines indicated in that statement will be realized.

The biggest stumbling block to direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians remains continuing settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories. We call upon Israel to stop settlement activities. That would facilitate the resumption of negotiations, in which all final status issues should be addressed.

We cannot, however, make Palestine's membership in the United Nations conditional upon a peace agreement, for that would be legally untenable, even while we support the resumption of direct talks to resolve the outstanding issues.

We welcome the recent agreement between Israel and Hamas on the exchange of prisoners. We hope it will ease tension and build confidence. We also hope it will pave the way for an early and significant easing of restrictions on movement of goods and people into the Gaza Strip, thereby addressing the dire humanitarian situation there.

India, for its part, has continued its development support to the Palestinian Authority. From the year 2009-2010, we enhanced our annual contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to $1 million, in addition to a special contribution of another $1 million to UNRWA in response to a flash appeal in 2010.

During the past two years, India has also contributed $10 million annually as untied budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority. We are offering 100 slots to the Palestinian Authority for capacity-building and human resource development under our technical and economic cooperation programme. With our IBSA partners Brazil and South Africa, we have also undertaken joint projects in Palestine, with a sports complex having just been completed.

While the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the most serious one in the region, we need to be mindful that resolution of that conflict by itself may not result in the achievement of a comprehensive and durable peace in the region. Other issues relating to Arab lands that remain under occupation are equally important. Progress on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks of the Middle East peace process is therefore necessary for a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

Developments in the Middle East since February this year underline the need to reinvigorate the search for this comprehensive peace, while the countries in the region undertake inclusive political processes and implement reforms to meet the legitimate aspirations of their people. It is important that the grievances of the people be addressed through dialogue and negotiations rather than resort to arms.

It is the responsibility of all countries to create conditions that enable their people to freely determine their pathways to development. That is the essence of democracy and fundamental human freedoms. No action should be taken from outside that exacerbates problems and gives space for the rise of extremism. The international community should stand ready to assist countries in their efforts while respecting the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries. As my Prime Minister said in the General Assembly on 24 September, societies cannot be reordered from outside through military force. Observance of the rule of law is as important in international affairs as it is within countries.

Guided by these principles, India stands ready to play its role in our collective endeavours to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Berger (Germany): Germany offers its condolences to the people of Turkey on the loss of lives resulting from the massive earthquake on Sunday, and to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the passing of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

Let me mention also that Germany obviously aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later on behalf of the European Union.

After a long period of standstill in the Middle East peace process, there is reason to hope that the stalemate might be broken by preparatory meetings of the Quartet with the parties on 26 October. As specified by the Quartet, a first step would be to agree on an agenda and method of proceeding in the negotiations. After that, the parties will have to take the next step, to come forward with comprehensive proposals on territory and security.

As the Quartet also said in its statement, meetings in themselves will establish the trust needed for successful negotiations. And trust is key in order to return to negotiations.

In this respect, we are extremely worried about the recent Israeli steps to expand settlement activity. The decision to advance the planning process on thousands of additional housing units in the settlement of Gilo and Givat Hamatos and plans to legalize illegal outposts within Israeli law undermine the trust that is needed for negotiations. They are not compatible with

Road Map obligations and run counter to current Quartet efforts.

We have called on the Government of Israel to dispel any doubts about its interest in serious negotiations. The imperative of trust should also be taken into consideration when looking at the Palestinian application for United Nations membership. We are mindful of the responsibility entrusted to us in the Committee on the Admission of New Members.

Let me very clear on this: Germany supports the establishment of a Palestinian State. As a matter of course, such a State will become a Member of the United Nations. But it is also our responsibility in the Council to give the Quartet's current efforts and actions the chance to bear fruit. There is no viable alternative to the resumption of negotiations. The two-State solution can be achieved only through a peace agreement between the parties. We want to see the State of Israel and a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Germany acknowledges the remarkable progress made by the Palestinian Authority in building the institutions of the future State of Palestine. In their reports, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations have clearly stated that the Palestinian Authority has crossed the threshold towards being a functioning State in key sectors. We commend the Palestinian Authority for demonstrating this capability. Now the political process must catch up with the progress made in State-building on the ground.

Germany is relieved at the release of Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit. We hope that his release and the related exchange of prisoners will give new momentum to the Middle East peace process. In that regard, we believe that now is the time to fully implement resolution 1860 (2009), which calls for the unconditional opening of crossings for goods and people to and from Gaza, thereby preventing the illicit trafficking of arms and ammunition.

Let me now turn briefly to the issue of Lebanon. It is with great sadness that we heard that Judge Antonio Cassese, the first President of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, passed away last Friday. The loss of that eminent scholar will undoubtedly affect all those who seek accountability and justice. In that context, we would like to recall the statement made by His Excellency Najib Mikati, Prime Minister of Lebanon, before the Council, when he reiterated Lebanon's commitment to all its international obligations, including those relating to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

In early 2011, Tunisians courageously stood up against an autocratic regime that had repressed them for decades. Nine months later, free elections are taking place in Tunisia, for the first time since it gained independence. Ninety per cent of those who registered for elections have cast their ballot. That is an impressive number. Peaceful, free and fair elections provide an important role model for countries where the Arab Spring has already made inroads and offer tremendous encouragement where people take to the streets seeking to live a better life in freedom and dignity. Germany will continue to actively support Tunisia through its transformation partnership.

Let me turn now to the question of Syria. On 4 October, two permanent members of the Council vetoed a draft resolution on the situation in Syria that condemned human rights violations, demanded an end to the violence and called for an inclusive, Syrian-led political process. The days that have passed since that vote have shown that the strategy advocated by some to give the Syrian regime more time has failed. Those who delayed Council action with reference to their bilateral efforts have not delivered. On the contrary: the situation has further deteriorated. In a statement made on 14 October, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, voiced her disappointment at the inaction of the Council. She reminded the members of the international community to take protective action in a collective and decisive manner before the continual ruthless repression and killings drove the country into a full-blown civil war.

Indifferent spectatorship is not an option. We still think that the Council should send a strong message in the form of a resolution. However, we are not going to accept any equidistant approach that suggests that the opposition could be as responsible for the violence as is the Government. Only the Syrian people can decide on the future of their country, and we therefore welcome the various efforts undertaken by the Syrian opposition to peacefully build a political platform. In that respect, we note the creation of the Syrian National Council as a positive step forward.

We also welcome the efforts undertaken by the League of Arab States to convince Damascus to enter into a meaningful dialogue with the opposition. The Arab League has set a clear timeline for such a dialogue. But it is clear that dialogue has to include all of the opposition and that there can be no meaningful dialogue as long as repression and killings of demonstrators continue.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China is deeply saddened at the major loss of life and property suffered by Turkey during the earthquake that struck its eastern region. My Prime Minister, Mr. Wen Jiabao, has already conveyed our condolences to the Prime Minister of Turkey, and China is ready to extend a helping hand.

I should like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing. I also listened very carefully to the statement made by the representatives of Palestine and Israel.

The Middle East peace process is currently at an impasse, which is a source of great concern to China. We hope that all of the parties concerned will demonstrate political will, and, on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map, settle disputes between Palestine and Israel by political and diplomatic means, so that the two countries can coexist in peace.

The issue of Israel's settlements is the direct cause of the current impasse in the peace talks and a major obstacle to their resumption. China deeply regrets the recent decision of Israel in connection with new settlements in East Jerusalem, to which we are opposed. We urge Israel to put an end to that project, to cooperate actively with international peace efforts so as to create conditions for building confidence between the two sides and break the present impasse.

China welcomes the recent agreement between the two sides on the exchange of prisoners, and we appreciate the mediation efforts made by countries such as Egypt and Germany in that respect. China hopes that both sides will seize this opportunity to continue to take constructive steps to ease tensions and minimize differences in order to restart the peace talks.

Efforts to solve the Middle East problem require the strong support and help of the international community. China welcomes and supports all efforts aimed at minimizing differences and promoting the relaunching of dialogue and negotiations.

On 26 October, the Quartet will hold talks with Palestine and Israel separately on the resumption of direct talks. We hope that all parties concerned will work together for the early resumption of talks and the achievement of substantive results in that context. China is in favour of the Council's playing a greater role in connection with the question of the Middle East.

China was among the first to recognize the State of Palestine. We have always been supportive of Palestine's just cause to establish an independent State. We support the vision of two States realized through political negotiations and the establishment of a fully sovereign, independent State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. China supports Palestine's membership in the United Nations.

To achieve a comprehensive, lasting and just peace in the Middle East, there must be progress on all tracks of the peace process, including the talks between Lebanon and Israel and between Israel and Syria. All parties concerned should create conditions for diplomatic negotiations with a view to ending the confrontations and tensions that have plagued this region for too long.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): Let me join previous speakers in expressing our sympathy and solidarity to the Turkish people and Government for the tragic loss of lives caused by the earthquake that struck eastern Turkey, and to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing of Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

It is not often that we can, at these regular briefings, welcome positive developments on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. So let me begin by welcoming the exchange of prisoners and the orderly manner in which the agreement that made it possible was implemented. We hope this positive development can be translated into further cooperation, in particular concerning the situation in Gaza. Fully lifting the blockade without prejudice to legitimate Israeli security concerns is vital to allow for life to go back to normal and reconstruction to take place.

Brazil believes that the time has come for Palestine to be fully represented at the United Nations. We hope the Council can take a decision on the Palestinian application very soon. The ultimate demonstration that Palestine is a peace-loving State is precisely the decision to turn to international law and to the United Nations to realize its legitimate right to self-determination. The recognition of the Palestinian people's legitimate right to sovereignty and self-determination increases the possibilities of peace between Israel and Palestine.

While supporting the Palestinian aspiration, Brazil remains convinced that a negotiating process, in which Israel's legitimate concerns for security are duly taken into account, is the way to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East.

Negotiations, however, must be meaningful and minimally balanced. International recognition of the Palestinian State and its admission in the United Nations as a full Member can help reduce the asymmetry that at present characterizes relations between the parties. No sustainable agreement can be reached if one side is too weak and is constantly undermined by the actions of the other on the ground.

In this regard, the announcements of new settlements in occupied East Jerusalem are not only against international law, but are also detrimental to the prospects for resuming negotiations. Coming just days after the Quartet called for the resumption of negotiations on the basis of Security Council resolutions and the obligations under the Road Map, they downgrade our hopes and contradict Israel's proclaimed disposition to negotiate a viable peace.

The continuation of settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian Territories destroys the very feasibility of a two-State solution. It is not reasonable to expect the Palestinians to keep negotiating as the reality on the ground is being deeply and, some fear, irreversibly altered. This is particularly worrisome in East Jerusalem and in small and medium settlements deep into the West Bank. In the current circumstances, therefore, strong political commitment is needed for the peace process to advance. This includes putting a halt to and reversing settlement activity.

The Quartet must impress upon the parties the need to abide by the steps and timeframe set out in the statement of 23 September. Given the link many countries see between the deliberations in the Council on Palestine's request for membership and the Quartet's efforts for the resumption of peace negotiations, it is important that the Council be briefed by the Quartet on progress made, or the lack thereof.

As Brazil's Foreign Minister Antonio Patriota stated in our debate on preventive diplomacy in September, "It behoves the Security Council to find solutions that can both resolve the challenges posed by specific situations of crisis and, at the same time, strengthen the multilateral system itself" (see S/PV.6621, p. 19).

The wave of change that has swept the Middle East and Northern Africa lends an even greater sense of urgency to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for a State of their own. In this pressing issue — perhaps one of the most important issues regarding international peace and security today — this Council must also be on the right side of history.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset we wish to express our condolences to Turkey with respect to the destructive earthquake that hit the country, which has claimed human lives.

We are grateful to Mr. Pascoe for his briefing on developments in the Middle East. We share his concerns with respect to the stalemate in the process of a Middle East settlement.

As of today, resumption of direct Israeli-Palestinian talks continues to be one of the most pressing tasks. It is distressing that the parties have yet to progress towards establishing an atmosphere of mutual trust, which is an important condition for a serious and productive dialogue.

At the same time, one must be encouraged by the fact that despite certain pessimistic forecasts, this past September did not lead to any major upheavals. What is more, the Quartet of Middle East mediators has stepped up its work, within which intensive efforts are under way to narrow the differences of the parties. We would like to highlight the Quartet's statement adopted on 23 September in New York, reaffirming the importance and inviolability of the entire international legal basis for the Middle East settlement, including the well-known Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles — including the key principle of land for peace — and the Road Map and previous agreements between the parties.

Nevertheless, the authorities in Israel, in violation of the norms and principles of international law and ignoring the view of members of the Quartet, continue to authorize the construction of more and more housing units in the occupied territories. We are particularly concerned that such decisions are adopted at a crucial time for the future of the peace process. We believe that settlement activities are a primary impediment to a two-State solution. They undermine the painstaking efforts of the international community to relaunch the dialogue and dash existing hopes.

Now more than ever, the parties need to take steps towards each other, and not unilateral steps that change the situation on the ground and prejudice the final parameters for a settlement. Israel must reassess its plans for construction in East Jerusalem and cease its demolition of Palestinian structures.

Despite the troublesome situation in the Palestinian-Israeli area, Russia, as a member of the Quartet, together with its partners, is prepared to use any opportunity to advance towards peace in the region. We anticipate that the Quartet's planned contacts on 26 October with representatives of the parties will help get the peace process moving again.

With respect to the official application of Palestine to the United Nations for membership, we believe that this bid is logical and legitimate. We recognized the Palestinian State as early as 1988 and are prepared to support the request of the Palestinians again. We believe their State meets all criteria in the United Nations Charter with respect to future Members of the world Organization.

Our view is that Palestine's application for membership in no way contradicts the negotiated peace process or diminish its prospects. Quite the contrary; it is complementary. It is important that the leadership of the Palestine National Authority has unequivocally and repeatedly emphasized its readiness to continue the quest for ways to resume negotiations.

Our sense is that despite the dire calls since September in the relations between the parties there has been some positive points. This is seen in the exchange of the Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, for more than one thousand Palestinian prisoners. That is an important humanitarian gesture of goodwill that contributes to an overall improvement of the situation in the region and of the atmosphere in terms of the Palestinian-Israeli relationship. The Russian Federation has supported the mediation efforts in this area, including during our contacts with the leadership of Hamas.

This arrangement gives us every reason to anticipate that the parties will be able to move towards addressing other sensitive issues as well, above all in terms of improving the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. We share the view of those who call for lifting all restrictions on the movement of goods in and out of Gaza, particularly with respect to building materials.

The inter-Palestinian reconciliation continues to be an imperative. The leaders of all Palestinian forces, especially Fatah and Hamas, need to step up their efforts to consolidate the Palestinian ranks. We would also like to call for progress on other tracks of a Middle East settlement, including the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. Without advancing on them, a lasting, comprehensive and just settlement in the Middle East is not possible.

With respect to the situation in Syria, which some colleagues have touched upon, the Security Council has been able and will continue to be able to put in its constructive word, as was just done with respect to Yemen. The Russian-Chinese draft resolution on the situation in Syria, which is aimed at a settlement and not at inciting conflict, continues to be available to Council members. It is clear that the strategy of certain members of the international community with respect to Syria, consistiing of threats and pressure that worsen the situation in the country through sanctions, does not work. We are encouraged by recent initiatives and steps proposed by the League of Arab States with regard to the Syrian Arab Republic.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): At the outset, I wish to offer my Government's condolences for yesterday's earthquake in the Turkish city of Van. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families. My Government stands ready to support the Government of Turkey in any way that it can.

I wish also to express my Government's sincere condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its people following the passing of His Royal Highness Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

This is a moment of huge opportunity for the people of the Middle East to build more open, free and prosperous societies. Yesterday, Tunisians cast their votes in the first ever democratic elections to appoint an Assembly to draft the country's new constitution. At the same time, the new Libyan authorities declared liberation from 42 years of ruthless dictatorship. For Tunisia, Libya and, indeed, Egypt, the road ahead will be difficult, but the change under way in those countries, as well as more broadly in the region, has shown that demands for political and economic freedom will spread more widely and by themselves, not because Western nations advocate them, but because they are the natural aspirations of people everywhere. We shall continue to work in partnership with those forging a new future for their countries.

The courage and determination of the Tunisian, Libya and Egyptian peoples and the changes taking place in their nations serve both as an inspiration to the rest of region and a warning to the dictatorships that continue to brutally crush the legitimate aspirations of their peoples. The lesson of the last nine months has been that regimes that use violence to oppress their peoples instead of responding to their legitimate demands will not survive. We are therefore deeply disappointed that, owing to the use of the veto by two members, the Security Council was incapable earlier this month of appropriately censuring the Syrian regime, which continues to kill, brutalize and torture its people at the same rate that it has been doing for the past seven months.

There is no sign of the reforms that Assad has been promising, nor any remorse for the tactics that have been used by the regime, which may amount to crimes against humanity. It is a worrying state of affairs when Iran's leadership, a regime that has itself crushed the rights of the people, is able to voice a greater sense of condemnation than this Council. It is time that members of the Security Council assume their responsibilities and take the strong collective action that is required if there is to be any hope of deterring the Syrian regime from its violent course.

In contrast, we are pleased at the unanimous adoption on 21 October of resolution 2014 (2011) on Yemen. President Saleh must now heed the calls of the Council and the wider international community. He must cease the bloodshed and the human rights violations and immediately sign the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative that will set into motion a transition of power.

The changes taking place across the Middle East are bringing into sharp focus the unfulfilled aspirations of the Palestinian people. They must realize their goal of an independent, viable State of Palestine, just as others in the region are demanding, and in some cases securing, their legitimate rights. At this critical and sensitive juncture for the region and the Middle East peace process, progress in securing a democratic peaceful State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security is urgent and essential.

Speaking on behalf of the United Kingdom, as a friend of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, I wish to make three points. First, the Quartet statement of 23 September set out a time frame for negotiations to be concluded over the coming 12 months on the basis of the well-known parameters — two States, based on the 1967 borders, with mutually agreed land swaps; security arrangements that protect Palestinian sovereignty whilst also providing sufficient reassurance to Israel; Jerusalem as the capital of both States; and a just, fair and agreed solution for refugees. It is time now for both parties to fully commit to direct negotiations within this framework and to make the bold compromises required to realize the goal we all want to see. We fully support the efforts of the Quartet envoys to restart talks, including through the important meetings with the parties in Jerusalem on 26 October.

Secondly, settlement activity must stop. We condemn the recent Israeli decisions to expand construction in the settlements of Mordot Gilo and Givat Hamatos. If implemented, those constructions would further erode the viability of a future Palestinian State. The proposed constructions in Givat Hamatos would cut the geographic contiguity between East Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

Settlement construction, including in East Jerusalem, is an obstacle to peace and erodes the space for meaningful negotiations on final status issues, including the status of Jerusalem. It undermines trust and is illegal under international law. It should stop. The Israeli Government should abandon its construction plans, and the time has come for the Israeli Government to stop merely talking about its readiness to resume negotiations and instead take the action necessary to inspire the confidence that will bring about meaningful negotiations.

Thirdly, we welcome the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. His long captivity and the lack of access by the Red Cross were unjustifiable. There must now be a sustainable and complete end to violence emanating from Gaza. There must also be an easing of restrictions on the flow of goods and personnel in and out of Gaza. The status quo only breeds resentment, radicalism and violence. An improved Gazan economy is both essential to the people of Gaza and in Israel's long-term security interests.

There is no time to waste in making progress towards peace. Without it, history demonstrates that the most likely outcome is backsliding towards violence. The leaders of both sides must demonstrate the leadership required to ensure the outcome that both their peoples want.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I would also like to express my condolences to the Republic of Turkey for the earthquake that has just struck it. We also offer condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the death of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

I thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his statement and I would like to make the following points. First of all, three months ago, France articulated here the desire that the legitimate aspirations expressed by the peoples of the region for freedom and democracy should be translated into reality swiftly and peacefully. Today, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya are facing the many challenges involved in building a democracy in civil harmony and with respect for pluralism, and France will continue to provide them with all of its support. We are pleased that Tunisians turned out to the polls in great numbers yesterday to vote on the political future of their country.

A new chapter is also opening for Libya. We call on the National Transitional Council to continue to work towards a democratic and pluralistic Libya in the context of respect for the rule of law, the fight against impunity and respect for fundamental freedoms.

We hope that a peaceful political transition will soon take place in Yemen. The Council fulfilled its responsibilities on Friday in calling on President Saleh to carry out a peaceful transfer of power on the basis of the initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council (see resolution 2014 (2011)).

In Syria, leaders who have lost all legitimacy are hanging on to power and dragging their country into a bloody spiral of violence. The Syrian people are already mourning more than 3,000 victims. Tens of thousands of peaceful demonstrators have been torn from their families, held in secret and tortured. Those responsible for this violence will be held accountable to justice for their actions. Repression must end so that Syrian can engage in the peaceful transition sought by the Syrian people. That is the only way to restore stability to Syria and preserve stability in the region, which is threatened by Syrian incursions in Lebanon, the flow of refugees into neighbouring countries and attempts by the Syrian regime to exploit Palestinian claims.

The members of the Council that have opposed or voted against a draft resolution of the Council will have to explain to history and to Syrian, international and domestic public opinion what they are offering specifically to bring an end to the bloodshed. This is no longer the time for words, to which the regime is not listening in any case. We must take action. Opting for Security Council paralysis is tantamount to supporting the Al-Assad regime and taking his side. The Syrian people understand that.

In this volatile context, parties must show the greatest restraint with respect to Lebanon and continue to cooperate within the framework of the Tripartite Commission to prevent any new mishap along the Blue Line. We reiterate our appeal to the Lebanese Government to honour all its international obligations, in particular those concerning the Special Tribunal and resolution 1701 (2006).

The demands of the Palestinian people are every bit as legitimate as those expressed throughout the region. It is legitimate and natural for the Palestinian people to ask for a Palestinian State to be established, while the two-State solution and the Palestinian people's right to self-determination enjoy the consensus of the international community. It is in that context that President Abbas submitted a request for admission as a full Member of the United Nations on 23 September. I will not dwell on our consideration of that request, which is under way in the Committee on the Admission of New Members and will soon be reported on to the Security Council.

Everyone knows, however, that the path to admission to the United Nations is strewn with obstacles. That is why, on 21 September, the President of the French Republic proposed an intermediate stage that could generate concrete progress for the Palestinians by elevating the status of Palestine in the United Nations to that of Observer State. That is the best way currently available to emerge from the impasse.

A concrete response to Palestinian demands will require the establishment of political conditions that would enable the emergence of the Palestinian State. That is what we must work on as a priority. To that end, the President of the French Republic called for a change of methodology, on the basis of his conviction that circumventing multilateral forums like the Security Council or eschewing the support of regional and European partners, inter alia, is not working. We must also stress the need for a credible framework, such as the parameters defined by the Europeans here in February or those announced by President Obama in May. Such a credible framework must be based on a clear timeline for negotiations in order to allow the parties to resume their talks on a sound basis and remove all preconditions.

On 23 September, the Quartet set such a timeline for negotiations. We welcome the parties' positive response to it. In two days, Palestinian and Israeli representatives will meet with members of the Quartet in Jerusalem in a new attempt to relaunch direct negotiations, which will begin with an initial phase on borders and security and conclude with an agreement on all of final status issues within a year. The chances of success are slim because trust between the parties has been deeply shaken. That is why the international community must pool its efforts and unanimously call on both parties to refrain from all provocation. France proposes the convening of a donor conference in Paris to help relaunch the process and strengthen Palestinian institutions.

In that context, we condemn once again the recent announcement of the expansion of Israeli settlements, which undermine peace efforts and hinder the achievement of the two-State solution. Following the decision to build in Gilo, taken following the Quartet declaration, a new project has been announced for construction in Givat Hamatos. The project threatens the contiguity of Palestinian territories between East Jerusalem and the West Bank and directly threatens the possible establishment of a two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. The announcement comes across not only as a provocation aimed at undermining trust, but also as a deliberate effort to make the creation of a Palestinian State impossible. How often must we reiterate that the construction of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is a blatant violation of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions. Israel must cease all settlement activity and abandon the projects it has announced. Similarly, we can only condemn a recent decision to legalize the outposts.

The settlements have become a central symbol of the conflict and the concrete denial of any discourse on the quest for a peaceful solution. However, we welcome the agreement that freed Gilad Shalit and Palestinian prisoners. We hope that the agreement will allow the Palestinian reconciliation process to move forward under the authority of President Abbas and in the context of commitments made by the Palestine Liberation Organization and recalled on 21 September before the General Assembly (see A/66/PV.11).

Gaza cannot be excised from the effort to establish a concrete basis for a Palestinian State. In that regard, the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) — including the lifting of the blockade imposed on the people of Gaza and an end to the unacceptable shelling of Israeli territory — remains necessary.

In conclusion, the peoples of the region are demanding the right to express themselves and to participate in shaping their own destinies. The Council heard the appeals from the people of Libya and Yemen and responded clearly. The situation in Syria can be treated no differently, and the Council must break its own silence, awake from its torpor and complacency, and exert the necessary pressure on the Syrian regime.

I would echo the words of the President of the French Republic to the General Assembly that the "spring of the Arab peoples imposes on us the moral and political obligation at last to find a solution to the Middle East conflict" (*A/66/PV.11, pp. 22-23*). The Council, mandated by the Charter to maintain international peace and security, cannot be exempt from that obligation.

Mr. Messone (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Madame, for having convened this important meeting under your presidency. Gabon wishes to echo the messages of condolence to the Government of

Turkey in the aftermath of the earthquake that struck the eastern part of the country, and to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the demise of its Crown Prince. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

With respect to the Palestinian issue, my delegation wishes again to stress, as it has always done in previous statements on this matter, that, alongside many other countries, it shares the fundamental goal of the existence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living in peace and security within recognized borders. Reaching that goal and achieving lasting peace entails working within the framework established by the international community, within which the Quartet is endeavouring to bring together the two parties. From our perspective, it is against that backdrop that Palestine's application to become a Member State should be considered

My delegation would like to reiterate its appreciation for the efforts of the international community, especially the Quartet's latest proposal aimed at relauching the peace process between Israel and Palestine, and in particular the next scheduled meeting between the Quartet and the parties. Although it is true that the Quartet's proposals aim largely at a timetable for continuing talks in the process, this new initiative nevertheless has the merit of laying the foundations for the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine, which have been at an impasse since the fall of 2010.

My delegation hopes that the next meeting between the Quartet and the parties sets a course towards the resumption of negotiations on final status issues, namely, borders, Jewish settlements, the fate of Palestinian refugees and the status of Jerusalem. We therefore call on the parties to refrain from any actions that undermine trust among them and have a negative impact on the restart of the negotiations.

Establishing trust also entails respect for international law and the resolutions of the Security Council. The announcement of new settlements and the blockade of Gaza are not conducive to an atmosphere for the resumption of negotiations. We condemn the most recent announcements in that regard.

I cannot fail to commend the prisoner-exchange agreement that was recently concluded between Israel and the Palestinians, which led, on 18 October, to the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit as well as Palestinian prisoners. We commend the role played by Egyptian and German diplomacy in reaching that agreement.

With regard to other situations in the region, I should like first to turn to Libya. In that connection, the developments of recent days should lead us to work together with the National Transitional Council to achieve peace, rebuild the country and re-establish security.

We also commend the way in which Tunisians have set in motion the process for establishing the basis for democracy and development in that country.

With regard to Lebanon, my delegation welcomes the calm in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. We emphasize the need for strict respect for resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). We also underscore the need for the cessation of violations of Lebanese airspace, which we believe to be unacceptable.

Lastly, with regard to Yemen, we join the appeal launched by the Secretary-General for a genuine dialogue in order to bring an end to the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situations in that country. The efforts made to that end by the Gulf Cooperation Council should be supported.

Mr. Gumbi (South Africa): My delegation expresses its appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing to the Security Council.

We associate ourselves with the statement to be delivered later today by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We also wish to thank the Ambassadors of Palestine and Israel for their statements.

The Arab Spring has prompted the Council to consider decisive actions in a number of cases. Yet, in the matter of the longest-standing item on our agenda pertaining to the Middle East, we remain paralyzed by inaction. We meet every month to discuss the situation in the Middle East. For the past several years, statements made around the table have followed similar lines. Yet, there is no real movement towards a final settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian question.

Since our latest debate (see S/PV.6623) there have been significant developments related to the Palestinian-Israeli question, including the Palestinian application for full membership of the United Nations, the Quartet proposal for resuscitating direct negotiations, and the exchange of prisoners. However, the significance of those developments continues to be diminished by Israel's continued building of illegal settlements.

On 23 September, President Abbas submitted an application for Palestine's full membership of the United Nations. The near universal excitement and support that accompanied that historic event is an indication of how important the issue of Palestinian statehood is, not just for the Palestinians but, in fact, for the rest of the world. In that connection, South Africa wishes to reaffirm its conviction that Palestine is a peace-loving State and that it is willing and able to carry out its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations.

Furthermore, South Africa believes that the issue of Palestine's membership of the United Nations should be resolved expeditiously and in accordance with the provisions of the Charter, the relevant rules of procedure of the General Assembly and the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council. Above all, South Africa believes that we cannot make Palestine's membership of the United Nations conditional upon a peace agreement.

Mindful of the political sensitivities inherent in that process, we believe that it is now more important than ever that we act in a manner that befits the stature of the Council and recommend Palestine's full membership of the United Nations. In addition, the Council should further fulfil its obligations under the Charter and simultaneously resuscitate the negotiations process, with the aim of achieving a two-State solution.

While the Quartet proposal for negotiations is welcome, and, in fact, long overdue, we should recall that we have had concrete time frames for those negotiations before. However, every time, the parties have fallen short of an agreement within a given time frame. We hope that the parties will this time commit themselves to finding a solution even earlier than the envisaged end of 2012. We also call on those countries that have influence on the parties to encourage them to participate in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions or changing the parameters of a final outcome.

The single obstacle to the negotiations is clearly the incessant building of illegal settlements by Israel. Just last month, after the promulgation of the Quartet blueprint, the Government of Israel defied unanimous calls from the Council and the Quartet, and announced its intention to construct 1,100 new units in the settlement of Gilo. Certainly, that regressive act alters facts on the ground and the parameters of final status issues. That, not the Palestinian application for membership of the United Nations, is an obstacle to peace.

South Africa welcomes the recent agreement on prisoner swaps. The agreement, which the Secretary-General described as a significant humanitarian breakthrough, is a positive step towards cooperation between Israel and Palestine. We hope that those who have been released will be allowed to live normal lives without persecution, and that the Israeli Government will fulfil its obligation to facilitate the release of all the remaining prisoners as soon as possible. The Government of Israel must also fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law with regard to the remaining Palestinian political prisoners — by ensuring their safety, allowing access to them by family members and respecting the basic human rights of the prisoners.

We reiterate our active concern about the abuse of the human rights of Palestinian children and about their detention. Needless to say, we are all very much aware of the long-lasting adverse psychological effects that such abuses will have on this vulnerable group. In that regard, a 12 June statement by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East cited in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 states that

> "The impact of home demolitions on children can be particularly devastating. Many children affected by demolitions show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety." (*see A/66/358, para. 31 (c)*)

A few days ago, in a statement to the Third Committee of the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur expressed concern about reports of violence against Palestinian children, including their arrest and detention by Israeli military authorities. We regret that there has been an increase in detentions of minors in recent years. Again, we call on Israel to fulfil its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law and to protect the rights of children.

South Africa looks forward to welcoming Palestine, sooner rather than later, as the 194th Member of the United Nations. We also hope that the process will achieve its stated objectives as soon as possible and ultimately bring about lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. My delegation looks forward to meaningful progress that will bring us closer to a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East region. In that connection, South Africa will continue to contribute in any way that can lead to the resolution of the Middle East problem in all of its aspects.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to add the voice of my delegation in pledging solidarity with the people of Turkey in the aftermath of the natural calamity that befell their country yesterday. Likewise, we convey our sympathy to the people of Saudi Arabia during this period of grief over the passing of their Crown Prince.

Mr. Barbalić (Bosnia and Herzegovina): At the outset, allow me to join others in expressing our deepest condolences to the Government and people of Turkey in the aftermath of the earthquake in the city of Van yesterday, as well as to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the death of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

Allow me also to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing. We further thank the Permanent Representative of Israel, His Excellency Mr. Ron Prosor, and the Permanent Observer of Palestine, His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, for their contributions to today's debate.

Bosnia and Herzegovina understands the request for membership in the United Nations that was submitted to the Secretary-General on 23 September as an aspiration of the Palestinian people for their own statehood. It is also our understanding that the entire international community would like to see the realization of a two-State solution, with a secure State of Israel and an independent State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security. The only way to bring about a just and lasting solution to the conflict is through direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Road Map, the agreements previously reached by the parties and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Bosnia and Herzegovina attaches particular importance to the determination of the Quartet to actively seek a comprehensive resolution of the Middle East conflict. In that context, we take note of the Quartet's statement issued on 23 September and the proposed timetable for the resumption of credible negotiations. We are all aware of the complex situation in which the negotiations must resume, but as we have previously stated, it is in the best interest of not only the Israelis and the Palestinians, but also the peoples of the region and beyond.

The continuation of settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, continues to pose a serious obstacle on the road to comprehensive peace. Those activities are illegal under international law and are contrary to Israel's obligations under the Road Map. We therefore call upon Israel to respond positively to the appeals of the international community and to end all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We also reiterate our view that the status of Jerusalem is a final status issue that must be resolved through negotiations between the parties.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip continues to be of great concern. We reiterate our appeal for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009). Israel's security concerns, including a complete stop to violence, must also be addressed.

My delegation is aware of the tremendous efforts required from both sides in order to return to the table and get the negotiation process moving. A number of obstacles must be overcome, but we believe that good political will and a strong sense of political responsibility can help to overcome those hurdles. Even small steps in the right direction can contribute to confidence-building and the creation of the general environment necessary for successful negotiations. In that context, we welcome the recent announcement and conduct of the prisoner exchange. We appreciate the efforts of all those who have contributed to the agreement, including the Egyptian and German negotiators. In that connection, we express our sincere belief that a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement in the Middle East is possible. We therefore urge both parties to make an extra effort and to seize the opportunity to overcome obstacles.

Allow me to conclude by turning briefly to the situations in Yemen and Syria. In Yemen, regrettably, the deadlock has been costly, the death toll has been rising, the economy is ruined, violence is flaring and some provinces have fallen out of Government control. Bosnia and Herzegovina strongly condemns all human rights violations and emphasizes that all who commit them must be held responsible. We express our hope that the transfer of power will begin as soon as possible, and we reiterate our support for an inclusive Yemeni-led process of transition.

The situation in Syria remains a source of deep concern and carries with it a real risk of greater violence and civil war. Once again, we strongly condemn the continued violence and use of force and urge the Syrian authorities to immediately stop such actions. We also reiterate our firm position that all those responsible for committing crimes must be brought to justice and held accountable. Bosnia and Herzegovina restates its support for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We still believe that an inclusive, Syrian-led dialogue and the implementation of the announced reforms are the keys to resolving the crisis.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

Allow me to join my colleagues in extending my condolences to the Government and people of Turkey on the victims of yesterday's earthquake, and to the Government and people of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

It is clear that there can be no final and durable solution to the Palestine question without real and genuine negotiations on final status issues, such as Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, water and security. That was repeatedly emphasized by President Mahmoud Abbas before and after submitting the request of the State of Palestine for membership in the Organization. That request should continue to be dealt with by the Council solely on the basis of its objective merits, in accordance with the 1948 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the admission of new Members.

The examination of the request by the Security Council should therefore in no way be linked to the Quartet activity, or subordinated to the course of the negotiation process and its vicissitudes. More fundamental, the question of the recognition of Palestinian statehood cannot and should not be subjected to the outcome of negotiations among Palestinian stakeholders. Otherwise, Palestinian statehood would be made dependent on the approval of Israel. In other words, the occupying Power would be granted a right of veto over the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, a right that the General Assembly has recognized as inalienable since 1974.

Despite all its shortcomings, let me now welcome the Quartet's statement of 23 September. Since the Quartet reiterated the obligations of both parties under the Road Map, it might be warranted to recall that, with regard to security, the Road Map provides that the

> "Government of Israel takes no actions undermining trust, including deportations, attack on civilians, confiscation and/or demolition of Palestinian homes and property, as a punitive measure or to facilitate Israeli construction".

As for settlements, the Road Map provides that "the Government of Israel immediately dismantles settlement outposts erected since March 2001," and provides that "consistent with the Mitchell Report, the Government of Israel freezes all settlement activity (including natural growth of settlements)". Furthermore, the Quartet statement of 23 September calls upon the parties to refrain from provocative actions if negotiations are to be effective.

On 29 September, less than a week after the Quartet statement was issued, Israeli authorities approved a plan to build 1,100 housing units in the settlement of Gilo, on land originally expropriated mainly from the Palestinian village of Beit Jala. Is this not clearly inconsistent with their Road Map obligations? Is this not clearly provocative?

On 14 October, Israeli authorities approved a plan for the construction of 2,610 units in the settlement of Givat Hamatos, on land illegally annexed from Beit Safafa and Bethlehem, further inserting East Jerusalem and cutting it off from the rest of the West Bank. Is that not clearly inconsistent with the Road Map obligations? Is this not clearly provocative?

Since 23 September, Israel has unceasingly continued to blockade Gaza, severely restricting the access of goods and limiting the movement of people, in addition to launching air strikes against its suffering people. Is this not clearly inconsistent with the Road Map obligations? Is this not clearly provocative?

Since 23 September, Israel has demolished Palestinian residences and farms in the regions of Qalqiliya, Kafr ad-Dik and Tubas. The Israelis have also uprooted and burned hundreds of olive and almond trees in Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron. In addition, armed settlers have physically assaulted and injured Palestinian civilians, including many children, as documented by reports of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Again, is this not clearly inconsistent with the Road Map obligations? Is this not clearly provocative? Should we also add that the erection of the wall continues unabated, despite the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and the Road Map obligations?

It would not be enough for the Council to recommend to the General Assembly the admission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations; the Council also has the duty to ensure an end to Palestine's occupation. Likewise, it would not be enough for the Council to agree that Israel is the party undermining the possibility of a resumption of effective negotiations, as called for by the Quartet; the Council also has the duty to hold Israel and its leaders accountable for not abiding by their international obligations, for disregarding Security Council resolutions and for systematically violating international law and international humanitarian law.

Mr. Moraes Cabral (Portugal): Allow me to present our sincere condolences and solidarity to the people of Turkey after the terrible earthquake that struck their country, and to Saudi Arabia on the passing of the Crown Prince.

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his very useful briefing, as well as the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their contributions to today's debate.

Momentous events are still taking place in the wider Arab world, with a direct impact on the Middle East and on the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. While the Yemeni and Syrian peoples continue their courageous struggle against despotic regimes, Tunisia held its first free elections in decades and the Libyan authorities announced the liberation of their country. Gilad Shalit has been freed and reunited with his family after many years in unjustifiable detention and isolation. Palestinian prisoners have also been released. President Abbas has submitted a request for Palestine to be admitted as a full Member of the United Nations. The Quartet has put forward a statement that clearly and constructively lays the ground for the resumption of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, and the parties will be meeting with its representatives in a couple of days in Jerusalem. The Quartet has also called upon the parties to refrain from provocative actions in order for those negotiations to be effective.

Let me address some of those issues, beginning with Gilad Shalit. Portugal sincerely hopes that his release and the related liberation of Palestinian prisoners will not only lead to positive developments in the security, humanitarian and economic situations in Gaza and the cessation of all attacks on Israeli civilians from the Strip, but that it will also contribute to easing tensions between neighbours and translate into concrete progress in the stalled Middle East peace process. Shalit's liberation took leadership, determination and a sense of compromise; these are the same values that will be necessary for Israelis and Palestinians during the important weeks ahead in order to ensure the successful resumption of credible negotiations between them.

Let us be clear. Only such negotiations on all core issues between Israelis and Palestinians, pursued in good faith, will allow for a peaceful and comprehensive resolution of their conflict, based on the two-State solution, mutual security and respect for each country's needs. That comprehensive solution has been made even more urgent by the historical events taking place across the Arab world. Those events continue to underscore that the status quo is unsustainable and that there is no time to squander if we wish to ensure that the changes in the region will indeed bring about peace and prosperity for all.

As will be said later on by the observer of the European Union in his statement, which we naturally endorse, it is necessary to heed and support the legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the region, including those of the Palestinians for statehood. That is, for Portugal, a matter of coherence and consistency.

Statehood is an inalienable and legitimate right of the Palestinian people. There is a strong international consensus that the Palestinian Authority is capable of running a State. Portugal commends the Palestinian leadership and people on this achievement, but recognizes that the Palestinian people will be able to fully explore their potential only in the framework of an independent and sovereign State. That can be achieved only with direct and meaningful negotiations with their Israeli neighbours.

Portugal will continue to examine the Palestinian application for full membership in the United Nations in a responsible way, as is our duty as a member of the Security Council. At the same time, we continue to strongly urge both parties to give diplomacy a chance and to work diligently towards a final and comprehensive settlement of their conflict under the terms and timelines outlined in the Quartet declaration of 24 September and on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Road Map, the agreements previously reached between the parties and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We also recall the Quartet's appeal to the parties to refrain from any provocative actions and to fully respect their respective obligations under the Road Map. The disturbing announcement of thousands of new housing units and settlements in Gilo, Pisgat Ze'ev and Givat Hamatos and the decision to entrench West Bank outposts are not only illegal but run counter to Israel's declared commitment to a negotiated solution to a final status issues, including borders and Jerusalem, as the Under-Secretary-General emphasized in his briefing.

We are equally troubled by the upsurge in violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians. We also condemn the recent attacks against Israel Defense Forces personnel. We remain particularly concerned with the increase in demolitions of Palestinian homes and infrastructure. We call on the Government to fulfil its obligations under international law to protect Palestinian civilians and property in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Israelis and Palestinians have a unique opportunity to resume direct and meaningful negotiations and to finally settle all outstanding issues, paving the way for two independent States living in peace and security and fully integrated in their region. Let them not forfeit that opportunity.

The situation in Syria has continued to deteriorate since the last discussion in the Council on 4 October (see S/PV.6627). The risk of the ongoing violence and political crisis escalating into a fully-fledged civil war with severe implications for the region increases by the day. Thus, we believe that it is extremely urgent that the Security Council send a strong, clear and united message to Syria. The authorities' violent repression against its population must cease immediately and those responsible for human rights violations must be held accountable. We welcome the active engagement by the Arab League and urge President Al-Assad to respond in a positive and timely manner to that appeal.

Portugal remains fully committed to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Syria. Therefore, we once again call for an inclusive, credible and Syrian-led political process aimed at effectively addressing the legitimate aspirations of Syria's population.

Mr. Osorio (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of my Government, I wish first of all to convey our grief to the Government and people of Turkey on the recent tragedy that cost so many lives. We also convey our condolences to Saudi Arabia on the death of Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. I am very grateful to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for the interesting report on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, in which he describes to us a disturbing scene of confrontation that is very worrying.

In recent months, we have seen the renewed and ongoing expression of the rightful demand of peoples in defence of their freedoms and fundamental rights, which for so long have been ignored and violated. That clamour that has been spreading in the entire region must lead to the strengthening of democratic institutions.

We welcome the progress and the reforms that have already started to bear fruit, as in the case of Tunisia with the elections for the Constituent Assembly that took place this weekend. Likewise, we value the efforts made by the Egyptian people and Government towards an ordered democratic transition.

We can say the same about the new Libya that is now starting to take shape. Its people, masters of their destiny, have decisively marked out the path of freedom amid pain and suffering. The time has come for Libya's democracy, the rebuilding of its social fabric, and the opportunity to lay the foundations for a stable and developing future. We wish its people every success in that task and offer our cooperation and support where they deem it appropriate.

We hope that in the case of Yemen, resolution 2013 (2011) adopted last week by the Council, along with the initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council, will contribute to a national dialogue that is not only necessary but urgent for a harmonious coexistence that would lead to the strengthening of institutions and meet the rightful demand of its people.

A cause of concern continues to be the very serious situation in Syria and the ongoing use of violence. We call an end to the violent repression and confrontation and for reason and dialogue to prevail. Reforms must take place immediately and produce tangible results so that its people can benefit from them as soon as possible.

On the Palestinian question, for many years we have expressed our view clearly in favour of a comprehensive, structured and lasting solution on the basis of the principles of the United Nations Charter and the noble goals of international peace and security. We understand and support the aspiration of the Palestinian people to have a State. We therefore reiterate that we support the goal of establishing a viable Palestinian State living in peace alongside Israel, with defined, secure and internationally recognized borders. However, it must be the result of an agreement that guarantees coexistence between those two peoples.

Fully convinced of that, we once again underscore that negotiation is the only possible and robust path to achieve that objective. Ending the settlement activities that we have always condemned, as well as less threatening language as a result, we hope, of the recent release of prisoners, will contribute to that.

We support the Quartet statement on the Middle East of 23 September because we believe it to be a concrete proposal that may bear fruit in so far as the parties accept the set timeline. We hope that the parties manage to agree a viable agenda and clear negotiating terms at the meeting to take place on 26 October.

In the context of that initiative, the Colombian Government contributed to the invitation to dialogue as a result of the Quartet's proposal through direct and discreet actions of President of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos Calderón and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who have had individual exchanges with the senior officials of Israel and Palestine. It entailed discreet good offices promoting dialogue and understanding since we believe the time has come to firm up a peace process.

Palestinian children and young people have the right to grow up in hope. The new generations of Israelis deserve to enjoy peaceful relations with their Arab neighbours. We must all do our best to ensure that that noble becomes a reality and that we find peace.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Nigeria.

My first thoughts must be to express our profound condolences to the Government and people of Turkey for the grave loss of lives following an earthquake, and to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

My delegation utterly condemns the senseless grenade attack in downtown Nairobi yesterday that caused numerous civilian injuries.

I wish very much to thank Mr. Pascoe for his very useful and comprehensive briefing on the current situation in the Middle East.

It is clearly evident from the various opinions expressed during this debate that the situation in the Middle East remains not only sensitive but also complex and daunting. Indeed, the mixed reaction to the application for membership of the United Nations by the Palestinian Authority illustrates the complex challenges in the path of closure on that issue.

Yet, it is undeniable that progress is imperative. The most tangible means of achieving progress is for all of us to take genuine and concerted action to bring the parties to the negotiating table, seizing the momentum offered by recent developments, including the statements of Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas at the General Assembly committing to peace (see A/66/PV.19), the statement of the Middle East Quartet, and the prisoner swap that saw the release of Gilad Shalit and brought freedom to over 1,000 Palestinians.

Nigeria views the Quartet statement proposing a new timetable for reaching a peace agreement before the end of 2012 as a credible attempt to reopen the stalled talks. The parties should embrace the proposal as a basis for substantive engagement to bridge their differences over common and status issues. Indeed, the 26 October meeting in Jerusalem between the Quartet envoys and Israeli and Palestinian officials offers an opportunity for the parties to develop an agenda for the negotiations. We reiterate that direct talks remain vital to fostering good and normal relations between the two neighbours and for sustaining peace in the Middle East long after the two-State solution has been realized.

Let me affirm unequivocally that Nigeria believes in a two-State solution as the best option for resolving the protracted conflict in the Middle East, consistent with the numerous resolutions of the General Assembly and the Council. In recognizing the State of Palestine 27 years ago, we were certain then that the Palestinian Authority had achieved a high degree of institutional performance that is sufficient for independent statehood, and we are even more certain now. Indeed, the people of Palestine deserve the right to live in freedom and dignity and to enjoy the full benefits and privileges of statehood.

In the two-State solution matrix, we must acknowledge that the independent State of Israel deserves the recognition of its neighbours. Israel has the right to existence as a peaceful and secure country without the threat of annihilation.

Achieving two viable States will require the parties to take a number of specific actions. They must now find and strengthen their common bonds and renew their commitment to engage in negotiations based on mutual trust, and without preconditions.

Israel must take concrete steps to freeze all settlement-related activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It must avoid military incursions into Gaza and ease the blockade of the territory. In the same vein, Palestinian leaders must deal with militancy and actions that endanger Israel's security, including firing rockets into southern Israel. They must also utilize only lawful channels to transport people, goods and materials out of Gaza.

Nigeria will continue to maintain close relations with both Israel and Palestine. We will also continue to support all efforts that can lead to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We believe that the Security Council should be consistent and remain an impartial peace broker whose efforts must encourage Israel and Palestine to return to direct negotiations.

With respect to Lebanon, we support its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We welcome the progress being made by Prime Minister Najib Mikati's Administration and its commitment to the implementation of Council resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004), as well as other international obligations. We urge Israel to halt further incursions into Lebanese territory. The parties must maintain calm along the Blue Line.

On Syria, we remain concerned about the deteriorating security, human rights and humanitarian conditions in the country. We encourage the Syrian authorities to implement the promised reforms, address the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and engage in genuine, credible dialogue with the opposition. Nigeria will continue to work with other Council members to achieve peace and stability in Syria.

I now resume my function as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): On behalf of the States members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), I would like to begin by expressing our condolences and deep sympathy to the Government and people of Turkey on the tragic loss of life due to the earthquake that hit eastern Turkey yesterday. I would also like to offer the Movement's condolences and sympathy to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for their great loss in the passing away of His Royal Highness Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud after a long life of achievement for his country, his region and the world at large.

I have the pleasure of addressing the Security Council today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement at this critical juncture in the Security Council's dealings with the situation in the Middle East. I would like to start by expressing the Movement's appreciation for today's briefing by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. The Non-Aligned Movement believes that the international community must renew its resolve to uphold its longstanding commitment to realizing a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, on the basis of international law and the well-known terms of reference of the peace process.

There is an international consensus that we must reach the endgame, the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital — the core of a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. It is regrettable that all serious efforts to date by international and regional parties, including the last Quartet statement of 23 September, to resume and advance direct negotiations on the Palestinian track towards that objective have failed. This is mainly due to the lack of clear parameters for the negotiations and the insistence of Israel, the occupying Power, on continuing to illegally, unilaterally and aggressively change the situation on the ground. Such actions belie Israel's claims that it accepts the Quartet statements and that it is indeed acting in good faith to end this conflict.

It is worth mentioning that around the same time last year, many of us had high hopes for the new round of final status negotiations, which began in early September 2010 under the direct auspices of United States President Barack Obama, with the participation of the Quartet, Egypt and Jordan, with the goal of reaching an agreement within one year. Yet the negotiations collapsed just a few weeks later, due to Israel's refusal to renew the moratorium on settlement activities, cease its illegal settlement campaign and abide by clear parameters for negotiations to achieve a just and final solution.

The persistence of such behaviour on the part of Israel and its refusal to commit to the internationally endorsed parameters for a two-State solution cast a dark shadow of doubt over its professed intentions. Instead, they reinforce the belief that Israel's insistence on the negotiation path is merely for the sake of negotiations and not to actually reach any comprehensive peace settlement.

It is highly condemnable that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to pursue its illegal settlement activities, and many other illegal policies and practices, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Such illegal actions undermine peace efforts and are the main obstacle to efforts to resume negotiations, making it nearly impossible to realize a two-State solution on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders. Recent announcements regarding the establishment of thousands more settlement units, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem, the continued Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes and properties, and devious attempts by the Israeli Government to legitimize its illegitimate settlement scheme are the true measure of Israel's alleged commitment to the peace process and a two-State solution.

All indications at present — from provocative declarations to accelerated construction on the ground to the continued revocation of Palestinian residency rights — are that Israel continues to choose settlement over peace and to choose occupation and conflict at the expense of the future of both peoples and the region as a whole.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains firm in its condemnation of Israel's illegal settlement policies and practices, stressing that all such unlawful attempts to alter the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remain rejected and unrecognized by the international community.

The fact that a majority of NAM member States co-sponsored the draft resolution presented to the Security Council earlier this year (S/2011/24) that called for the immediate cessation of all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory — as outlined in relevant letters addressed by the Chair of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement to the President of the Council — reflects the international position on this most critical issue. The Non-Aligned Movement regrets that the Security Council did not adopt the draft resolution, as we had hoped and expected.

The Movement therefore reiterates its call for the Council to be resolute in demanding that Israel abide by its legal obligations. Moreover, the Movement believes that calls for compliance must be backed by credible action, which is incumbent upon this Council in light of its duties under the Charter and given the fact that the occupying Power is continuing to deliberately obstruct the attainment of peace and security in our region.

Israeli impunity must no longer be tolerated. Israel must be called upon to abide forthwith by all of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Road Map. That includes an immediate cessation of all settlement activities and full respect for the international consensus on the issue, including the calls from the United Nations, NAM, the European Union, the Quartet and all other concerned international and regional bodies and actors.

The Non-Aligned Movement emphasizes the need to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to lift fully its illegal blockade, in accordance with its obligations under international law, Council resolution 1860 (2009) and all other relevant United Nations resolutions. The Movement reiterates that this unacceptable and unsustainable situation must end. The unresolved crisis continues to pose serious repercussions on international efforts to promote peace and continues to inflict deep suffering on the Palestinian people.

In that connection, the Movement reemphasizes the need for the reconstruction of Gaza, and calls on Israel to open all of its crossing points with Gaza and allow for the sustained and regular movement of persons and goods, including the import of essential reconstruction materials, which includes those necessary for the long overdue reconstruction of United Nations facilities and the schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and normal commercial flows. NAM also reiterates the need to empower UNRWA with all financial and human support necessary to undertake its mission effectively.

NAM welcomes the prisoner swap deal under Egyptian auspices that led to the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in exchange for more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees. NAM strongly condemns the continued detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians in Israeli jails, where ill-treatment and torture are widely used.

It is the conviction of the members of the Movement, as stated in the special declaration adopted by the NAM ministerial conference in Bali in May, that those prisoners, who include children and women, should be immediately released and proper international inspection of their current condition should be a priority for the international community, particularly the Security Council and the Human Rights Council.

There were three main developments during the last few months. The first one was the historic speech given by President Abbas on 23 September in the General Assembly Hall. The second development was the agreement on Palestinian national reconciliation carried out under the auspices of Egypt, the core pillar of which was the return of power to the people through legislative and presidential elections within a year. The third development is the fact that to date, more than 130 countries have recognized the State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, including more than 100 members of the Movement, and they comprise more than the two-thirds majority of the General Assembly. Those three major developments, coupled with the recognition of all major international organizations and institutions including the United Nations, the World Bank and the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, that Palestinian institutions are more than ready for statehood, clearly indicate that the dream of a Palestinian State is closer than ever to becoming a reality.

Indeed, there is unanimous conviction that Israel's respect for its obligations is imperative for the resumption of direct negotiations towards achieving the two-State solution on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. The international community must exert all efforts to compel Israel to abide by its obligations and commitments forthwith and to resume final status negotiations based on clear parameters that would include: cessation of all settlement activities, an agreed timeframe that recognizes the urgency of the matter and the 4 June 1967 borders as the foundation and starting point for negotiations, as set out by President Obama in his 19 May speech and as supported by the entire international community.

In so saying, the Movement stresses the utmost importance of the efforts of the international community and the United Nations and of a credible negotiation process for bringing an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, as well as the achievement of an independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Turning now to Lebanon, the NAM condemns Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanese sovereignty and the recurrence of serious breaches to Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). The Movement calls on all concerned parties to implement fully Security

Council resolution 1701 (2006) in order to end the current fragility and avoid the recurrence of hostilities.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken, or to be taken, by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as the Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null, void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Tarawneh (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today we are experiencing an Arab renewal that seeks realization of its hopes and aspirations, rejects the current situation and calls for a better future with dignity. After the current stage, the most pressing issue on the way forward will require attention to the Arab peoples' pride and sources of indignation that will need to be resolved. I refer, in particular, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has lasted far too long. In fact, the calls of the Arab Spring are for justice and non-discrimination will not accept that Israel or any other party remain above the law or international legitimacy.

It is absolutely unacceptable that Israel would continue to build settlements, thus undermining the efforts to settle the conflict based on the two-State solution and the 1967 borders. As long as short-term political gains retain priority over long-term strategic interests, Israel will remain incapable of building a better future for its people. Political decision makers in Israel need therefore to promote broader strategic interests rather than short-term interests. Today, more than ever, it is necessary for Israeli decision makers to consider the future and free their foreign policy from a siege-based mindset in order to establish good-neighbourly relationships based on equality.

Jordan confirms its support for Palestine's application to full membership as an independent State on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That request was made to the United Nations after Israel had impeded all international and regional efforts towards a resumption of negotiations and had denied the negotiations any substance due to its settlement activities and its refusal to negotiate on the basis of the 1967 borders.

Jordan also reaffirms its support for a final solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that addresses all final status issues, including the issues of settlements, Jerusalem, refugees, borders and water, within specific timeframes.

Jordan believes that recognition of the Palestinian State within the United Nations is neither a substitute for direct negotiations nor is it aimed at delegitimizing Israel, for such recognition of the Palestinian State would leave five points of the final status negotiations pending, which means that the conflict would continue without being fully addressed.

Jordan therefore believes that the latest statement of the Quartet is clear and creates a good opportunity for returning to the negotiating table, as long as there is full respect without conditions for its substantive contents or without any reservations that could deny any meaning to the negotiations. The United Nations and the international community, as well as the influential parties, must take action to bring pressure to bear on Israel to ensure that it complies with the dozens of resolutions that reaffirm the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination on its own national territory, including East Jerusalem, based on the 1967 borders. There must also be a comprehensive, just settlement of the issue of Palestinian refugees, without which there can be no peaceful settlement.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia): Thank you, Madame President, for the opportunity to speak at this meeting.

Allow me, first, to thank all the delegations that have expressed their sympathies and condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince. We appreciate their support and solidarity. I would also like to extend our condolences to the people and Government of Turkey for their losses caused by the earthquake that struck their country.

I further want to point out that we align ourselves fully with the statement made by the Egyptian Ambassador on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

At the outset, I am honoured to express my gratitude to you for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

This meeting is being held at a time when the Palestinian people are paying for the reluctance of the international community and the Security Council to deter Israel from its actions against the Palestinian people, such as killing, displacement, imprisonment, blockades, annexation of land, confiscation of property and plundering the wealth of Palestine. All those actions subject the Palestinian people to further intense oppression and torture, with the goal of forcing them to surrender and despair.

The Israeli Government persists in its intransigence, refusing to give the Palestinians their basic rights. It proceeds with its illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, riding roughshod over international will, countries' condemnations and United Nations resolutions issued in this regard. Israeli settlements surround most cities of the West Bank and seize nearly half of their water resources, making it difficult for any Palestinian Government to work effectively.

Furthermore, it is unethical that the occupation forces impose a blockade on an entire people and continue their settlement activities, secure from any accountability. Most of the countries gathered here, including the permanent members of the Security Council, have issued individual statements against the continuation of Israeli settlement activities. What they need to do now is to take an international, collective stand that clearly reflects that existing unanimity. It is high time for Israel to realize that it cannot continue to exempt itself from full compliance with the rules of international law-based behaviour.

The "Apartheid Wall" embodies irrefutable evidence of the extent of the Israeli occupying Power's persistence in violating United Nations resolutions, particularly General Assembly resolution 181 (II), on the pretext of legitimate self-defence. In fact, the true purpose of building the wall is to change the facts on ground and to evict the Palestinian people, prevent East Jerusalem from escaping Israeli sovereignty and secure control over water resources, in addition to establishing as many settlements as possible for the settlers. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reiterates that security can be achieved neither by building symbols of oppression and occupation nor through the unjustified use of military force. Rather, security can be achieved by respecting human rights and the rule of law.

The situation in the besieged Gaza Strip constitutes another factor that exacerbates the problems that the Palestinian people face. In fact, the Gaza Strip has become one big prison, as a result of the unjust blockade imposed by Israel against the Palestinians, preventing them from exercising their natural rights and accessing their necessary services and needs. Meanwhile, a generation of Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip are born and raised with nothing in their minds but devastation, destruction and the world's failure to support them in exercising their natural rights — which are the same as those of any other children in the world. Therefore, in this Chamber, we urge the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities by lifting the siege on Gaza and opening the crossings that lead to it.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia calls upon the international community to compel Israel to take the necessary procedures to protect the holy sites and places of worship in Palestine, particularly in Jerusalem. In addition, the Kingdom urges the international community to force Israel to release the remaining Palestinian prisoners, some of whom have not seen their families for decades.

The Kingdom would not make such demands without extending a hand of peace and proving its commitment to a just and comprehensive peace. In this vein, the Kingdom introduced a peace initiative that was adopted by all Arab States in 2002, known as the Arab Peace Initiative. That Initiative reiterates the Arabs' commitment to achieving a just and comprehensive peace based on the rules of international law. Nevertheless, we have not seen any similar commitment from Israel. Rather, Israel has evaded its duties and responsibilities and continued its many violations against the Palestinian people and their rights.

We therefore, now more than ever before, call upon the Security Council to support the Palestinian people and recognize their State, within the borders of 4 June 1967, and with Jerusalem as its capital. Israel and the children and people of Palestine must be made to see clearly that the international community has agreed, albeit belatedly, to support the Palestinian cause by granting Palestine full membership in the United Nations. We call upon Israel to withdraw fully from all the Arab territories occupied in 1967.

In conclusion, peace in the Middle East requires the commitment of all States of the region to be guaranteed security. We cannot talk about peace in the Middle East without referring to the recently discovered plot to assassinate the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United States of America. According to the evidence provided by the competent authorities of the United States, it is clear that the perpetrators who planned and supported the implementation of this heinous crime either work for the Iranian Government or are affiliated with it.

The Kingdom reiterates its denunciation and condemnation of any attempt to tamper with its security or assault any of its citizens or officials. The Kingdom will not stand idle in response to those who play foul with its security. Furthermore, the Kingdom reaffirms its full cooperation with the international community and the Security Council, which is entrusted with maintaining international peace and security, to ensure that anyone involved in that plot, whether State or individual, be held accountable.

The President: There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.20.

United Nations S/PV.6636 (Resumption 1)

Security Council

Sixty-sixth year

Provisional

6636th meeting

Monday, 24 October 2011, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Ogwu	(Nigeria)
Members:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ms. Marinčić
	Brazil	Mr. Garcia
	China	Mr. Zhang Changwei
	Colombia	Mr. Alzate
	France	Ms. Legendre
	Gabon	Mrs. Ntyam-Ehya
	Germany	Mr. Eick
	India	Mr. Raguttahalli
	Lebanon	Mr. Ramadan
	Portugal	Ms. Vaz Patto
	Russian Federation	Mr. Demin
	South Africa	Mr. Klaas
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Miss Allum
	United States of America	Mr. Grant

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Bahrain. Unless I hear any objection, I invite the representative of Bahrain to participate in this meeting.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Mr. Morejón (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I should like to convey, on behalf of the Government of Ecuador, our sympathy with the sisterly nation of Turkey in connection with the earthquake that took place yesterday and to express our condolences to the families of the victims. We were also saddened to hear of the passing of the heir to the throne of Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and shares the sorrow of King Abdullah, the royal family and the people of Saudi Arabia.

My delegation would like to express its views on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine. I should like to begin by thanking Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing. My country aligns itself with the statement by the Ambassador of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Government of Ecuador, which abides by the norms and principles of international law, particularly with regard to the pacific settlement of disputes, wishes to express its concern at the length of time during which the Security Council has been seized with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — seven decades. My delegation is keen to support stability in the region and has recognized Palestine as a State.

The developments that have taken place in recent months, including the historic address by President Abbas before the General Assembly, on 23 September; the organizing of legislative and presidential elections in Palestine; and the support of most States Members of the United Nations for the recognition of Palestine as a State are further evidence of the fact that the Palestinian Authority is capable of governing itself as a State.

Another positive step towards peace is the prisoner exchange between Israel and Palestine, which is taking place in stages. The international community welcomed the freeing of the Israeli soldier and of 477 Palestinian prisoners on 18 October.

It is regrettable, however, that the progress achieved through international efforts, including the recent statement of the Quartet on resuming and making progress in direct peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine, has come to naught because of Israel's lack of clear parameters on its settlement policies. The Palestinian people suffer humiliation, expulsion and violence at the hands of the continuing Israeli occupation and are the victims of aggressive and illegal actions. This has not changed and continues with impunity.

In addition, the construction by the occupying military force of the Wall in Jerusalem prevents Palestinians from having access to hospitals, schools and their places of work. The Palestinians also suffer as a result of inadequate public services; schools are few, and the economy is in ruins. Jerusalem does not have a production economy, and Israel controls the entire territory.

The international community must bring pressure to bear in Israel to end the occupation. It is Israel's responsibility to make progress with the negotiations so as to achieve the two-State solution, in keeping with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and, of course, the Road Map.

In that connection, we would remind the Security Council of its historic responsibility to positively analyse this issue, which for more than 64 years has posed an obstacle to the achievement of peace and security in the Middle East and in the eastern Mediterranean region.

My delegation appeals for a dialogue between the parties with the goal of ensuring that in the very near future, the two States of Israel and Palestine can coexist in the region, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mr. Hermida Castillo (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we wish to convey our most sincere condolences to the people and the Government of Turkey in connection with the tragedy that they have suffered as a result of yesterday's earthquake.

Nicaragua, as a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, associates itself fully with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt in his capacity as Chair of the Movement.

Nicaragua once again reiterates its most fervent condemnation of the illegal occupation by Israel of all of the occupied Arab territories in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, and demands Israel's immediate withdrawal. We condemn the expansionist Israeli policies and practices of building and not dismantling settlements, as well as the inhumane blockade of Gaza and the policy of breaking up the West bank and other Palestinian territories.

The Security Council is meeting on the eve of a historic moment that will give undeniable reality to the existence of a Palestinian State that is recognized and fully welcomed into our Organization, and represent the implementation, at long last, of the many resolutions and agreements calling for the creation of two States — one Arab and the other Jewish — on Palestinian territory.

We can no longer tolerate the logic of denying the very existence of the Palestinian State. That logic is part and parcel of a policy of corralling the Palestinian people, and it is based on an unacknowledged determination to deny all Palestinian citizens their very humanity. It is extremely urgent that Israel free, as soon as possible, all Palestinian political prisoners, who suffer, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, inhumane conditions, torture, captivity and indefinite isolation. Israel must put an end to those violations and comply with its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law.

Since the victory of the Sandinista popular revolution, in 1979, Nicaragua has witnessed the heroic fight of the Palestinian people and the substantial concessions they have made, which, shamefully, were responded to by Israel with more illegal settlements, more humiliation, more deaths, more systematic murders of Palestinian leaders, more destruction of homes and more expulsions, including in East Jerusalem.

For all of those reasons, Nicaragua reiterates the need to put an immediate end to the intolerable impunity that Israel enjoys, which has been irresponsibly guaranteed it by the Security Council, in particular through the indiscriminate use of the veto, which has become Israel's greatest accomplice.

It is high time that the Security Council lived up to its responsibilities and demand that Israel make a commitment to peace. It is time to abandon threats of veto. It is time for the international community to substitute concrete action for rhetoric. Nicaragua thus calls for the immediate recognition of the Palestinian State along its 1967 borders by the Security Council and the General Assembly. Only in this way will there be a firm and lasting peace that allows both peoples to effectively enjoy all their rights, putting an end to an inexplicable injustice. May those who oppose it do so publicly, and thereby publicly acknowledge their own shamefulness.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Apakan (Turkey): Allow me at the outset to express our gratitude to those who have expressed condolences and sympathies to my Government and the Turkish people at this time of loss and suffering following the devastating earthquake in Turkey. We have felt the solidarity of the international community with us. We also want to extend our heartfelt condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi people for the passing away of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

As the Security Council holds another open debate on the situation in the Middle East, a long-awaited transformation and restoration process is under way in the region. The quest for democracy in the region may delayed, but it cannot be reversed. As the advocate of democracy, pluralism, human rights and fundamental freedoms in the region, Turkey will not waver in its support for those who are peacefully demanding change.

We welcome the conclusion of the rightful struggle of the Libyan people for freedom, justice and democracy with a decisive victory. The fate of the autocratic regime that prevailed for more than four decades constitutes a bitter lesson that should be taken into account in all its dimensions within the context of the ongoing change and democratic transformation movements in the region. We strongly believe that the political process in Libya will be completed in unity and solidarity through an inclusive approach embracing all segments of that society.

Meanwhile, we welcome resolution 2014 (2011) on Yemen, adopted unanimously by the Security Council, as a timely, constructive and positive step taken by the international community with a view to bringing an end to the clashes in that country. Turkey fully supports the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative. We reaffirm our wish that the crisis in the country be overcome through peaceful means as soon as possible.

In that context, Turkey is extremely concerned about the developments in Syria. We observed with great concern the ongoing violence against civilians in Syria. Violence is not the effective to follow. Sectarian and ethnic divides must be avoided at all cost. The legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people should be respected.

While many in the region aspire to a better future, Palestinians in their millions — whether in Gaza, the West Bank or the refugee camps across the region — continue to suffer a disastrous fate not of their own making. This anomaly must be addressed as a matter of utmost urgency. Turkey rejects violence in any shape or form, and by any party, as unacceptable and unjustifiable. We also believe that there can be no genuine alternative to a negotiated settlement.

There is no doubt that meaningful engagement that inspires confidence in both Palestine and Israel cannot begin while settlement activity continues day in and day out, including in occupied East Jerusalem. Indeed, Israel's continuous settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories and its deliberate choice for settlements of the regions that separate the Palestinian territories destroy the basis for peace. We once again call on Israel, based on its Road Map commitments, to cease all settlement activity and return to direct negotiations with the Palestinian side on the basis of the 1967 borders. That is currently the only way that will open the path towards the realization of a two-State solution based on the well-established principles whereby Israel and Palestine can live side by side in peace and security.

Palestine has submitted its application for membership to the United Nations. That historic step was long in coming. Turkey believes that it is high time for Palestine to become a Member of the United Nations and to be recognized by all nations, based on its 1967 borders, as a full-fledged Member State within the international community.

The very notion of a two-State solution, reaching as far back as 1947, is the firm and clear basis for that. Common sense and good conscience dictate that, as Israel did 63 years ago, Palestine should become a Member of the United Nations. That will also help direct negotiations, since it will create political equality between the two parties. Ultimately, beyond all the legal or political arguments, it is simply not fair to hold the State of Palestine hostage to Israel's continued intransigence.

Turkey welcomes the recent prisoner exchange. This is a humanitarian issue and, irrespective of other developments, Turkey has played its part to support the talks and to ensure that a fair deal could be struck that would also help create a positive atmosphere for addressing other issues.

Meanwhile, the situation in the Gaza Strip continues to be an embarrassment to the international community. The inhumane and illegal practices there must end. Unfortunately, Israel's unlawful blockade of Gaza continues. The international community must ensure that there is accountability both for the blockade and for Israel's attack on the humanitarian aid flotilla last year that left nine civilians dead in international waters. That is why we envisage mobilizing the relevant platforms, with the support of Member States, in order to refer that issue to the International Court of Justice.

On the other hand, having welcomed the unity agreement among the Palestinians, Turkey hopes that the process of national reconciliation can be concluded soon with the formation of an inclusive and democratically representative Government that will take the Palestinian nation to free and fair elections.

In conclusion, let me reiterate once more Turkey's strong support for the realization of a just and lasting comprehensive peace in the region, based on the two-State solution, as well as our determination to assist our Palestinian brothers and sisters in attaining their long-delayed goal of a viable, peaceful and prosperous State of Palestine that is a full-fledged Member of the United Nations.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): First of all, the Maldives would like to offer its sincere condolences to the people and Government of Turkey for the recent tragedy. We are also deeply saddened by the passing of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and would like to extend our deepest condolences.

The Maldives congratulates Nigeria on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and commends the work completed to date. We further thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing today.

The Maldives has recently undergone a transition from autocracy to democracy, and we understand full well the growing pains that come with such a transformation. Yet we sincerely hope that the situation in Syria will find a peaceful solution and that the dialogue process to take place in Cairo will see fruit in the form of greater democratic reforms and will create venues for the aspirations of the Syrian people to have their voice heard in Government.

The Maldives applauded resolution 1973 (2011) on Libya, and now supports that country's current transition to a functioning democracy. Much work remains to be done by the National Transitional Council to prepare for elections that will be free, fair and meaningful in order to realize the aspirations of the Libyan people. Only with the support and assistance of the international community will a stable Libya pull through.

The Maldives believes that the single most important issue concerning peace in the Middle East is the recognition of a Palestine State. We do not believe that there can be a meaningful dialogue without this acceptance of statehood. For 40 years, the ongoing peace process in the Middle East has been continually undermined by the very fact that it rests on an unequal power relationship. While this dynamic will not change until real peace is established, we as the United Nations have an obligation to level the playing field. We have an obligation to ensure that all elected Governments have representation that is equal to the mandate given by their people.

Furthermore, it is clear that Palestine has a Government that is capable of administering its country and an Administration that is ready to take on the full burden of governance. The only way forward, therefore, is through the international recognition of Palestine as a State with a view to Palestinians negotiating their own interests and concentrating on developing their own socio-economic infrastructures while being at peace with Israel.

After 64 long years of inaction, the time to move forward is now. Let me conclude with an appeal from the people of the Maldives to support three generations of Palestinians who have lived their lives under the yoke of occupation. The Maldives strongly calls on all States, especially the members of the Security Council, to prevail against a history of failure and stand up for the dignity of these men and women by supporting a free and independent Palestinian State.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): First of all, on behalf of the Government of Malaysia, I wish to convey our condolences to the Government of Turkey at the tragic occurrence of the earthquake in Turkey yesterday. We also wish to offer our condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of the Crown Prince.

Let me now congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council.

Secondly, I wish to align my delegation with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the statement to be delivered by the representative of Kazakhstan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

For more than half a century, the international community has yearned for a peaceful and just solution of the Palestinian issue. Decades of strife and politico-legal arguments have made the quest for a solution ever more elusive. The United Nations, including the Security Council, has churned out over 180 resolutions on Palestine, at last count. However, we are still grappling with this task today, as no tangible outcome has been produced. That is partly due to our inability to bring into effect the very resolutions that we have adopted at all levels of this Organization.

Malaysia fully endorses the application of Palestine to become a Member of the United Nations, as we feel deeply for the people of Palestine, whose forefathers inhabited the land for virtually the last two millennia. All of us have to support Palestine in exercising its natural and inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination, in the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

This support is in accordance with the two-State solution and takes into account the security concerns of both parties. In the light of the fact that more than two thirds of the States Members of the United Nations have recognized the State of Palestine, we call on the Security Council to expedite this application at the earliest opportunity. The Security Council has the moral, political and legal responsibility to ensure that Palestine is admitted as a Member of the United Nations without further delay. There is no reason for the Council not to do so.

In addition, we call on Israel to immediately fulfil all of its obligations, including refraining from provocation. The recent Israeli settlement plans in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are deplorable and are illegal under international law. Such provocative acts have put the two-State solution in jeopardy. We therefore call on Israel to fulfil its international obligations by completely stopping its settlement activities and to abrogate all policies and practices that contravene international law and minimum standards of internationally accepted basic human rights, including the immediate lifting of the unlawful blockade of Gaza.

Although the recent agreement between Israel and Palestine for the swap of over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners is a step towards achieving peace, we should not forget that 5,000 Palestinian civilian prisoners, including children, women and elected officials, are still imprisoned or arbitrarily detained by Israel. Even more worrying are the extremely poor, undignified and, in some cases, life-threatening conditions under which the Palestinian prisoners are being detained in Israeli prisons and detention centres.

Malaysia calls on Israel to stop this mistreatment of Palestinians and to observe appropriate standards related to the treatment of prisoners. Further, we also call for the release of all Palestinian prisoners, as such release is essential for creating a climate of mutual trust, which is necessary for the resumption of permanent status negotiations.

Resolving the issue of Palestine requires the international community to focus all its energy and efforts on achieving a comprehensive peace in the region and restoring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to an independent State of Palestine. All parties must act truthfully and sincerely towards achieving these objectives.

We again urge the Security Council to take necessary measures, failing which would put the Council's credibility as the principal organ responsible for international peace and security at risk. Now is the time for peace, and we should not let this opportunity go to waste.

Mr. Kodama (Japan): Allow me at the outset to express heartfelt sympathies and condolences on behalf of the people and the Government of Japan to the people and the Government of Turkey for the tremendous losses and damage caused by the earthquake. Japan is ready to extend as much assistance as possible for the recovery and reconstruction of Turkey, in cooperation with the international community.

I would also like to convey the deepest condolences of the people and the Government of Japan to the people and the Government of Saudi Arabia on the sad demise of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia.

Japan fully understands the earnest aspiration of Palestinians to build their own State and strongly supports a two-State solution under which Israel and a Palestinian State would live side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition. Japan supports the vision that under a two-State solution the borders should be defined through negotiations, based on the 1967 lines, with mutually agreed swaps, in a way that will achieve the peaceful coexistence of a viable Palestinian State and Israel with secure and recognized borders.

Through a two-State solution, the Palestinian people will exercise their right to establish an independent State; Israel will enjoy a greatly enhanced security environment; and both parties will be able to launch full-fledged efforts at cooperation for their mutual prosperity.

A two-State solution can be achieved only through sincere negotiations between the parties concerned. Japan has consistently encouraged both sides to resume direct negotiations, in cooperation with the efforts of the international community. In this connection, Japan strongly supports the Quartet's 23 September statement, including the timetable it sets out, and pays respect to the vigorous endeavours of the members of the Quartet. Japan welcomes the announcement that separate meetings will take place between Quartet members and the respective parties on 26 October in Jerusalem. We strongly expect that these meetings will be a step forward towards the resumption of direct negotiations.

Japan has been closely watching the discussions in the Council's Committee on the Admission of New Members.

Japan welcomes the recent agreement between Israel and Hamas for the release of Gilad Shalit and of the Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. We hope that this agreement will contribute to the building of confidence between the parties and lead to the early resumption of direct negotiations between them.

Japan does not recognize any measures that prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations and associates itself with the Quartet in calling on both sides to refrain from any provocative actions. Both parties must abide by their obligations under previous agreements, most importantly the Road Map.

Japan reiterates its strong call to Israel to fully freeze its settlement activities in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. In this connection, Japan deeply deplores the recent series of announcements by the Israeli Government of plans for construction of new housing units in East Jerusalem. At the same time, we call upon the Palestinian Authority to continue its efforts to improve security and fulfil its commitments to cease violence and work against incitement.

Japan has been supporting the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to establish statehood and is committed to continuously providing assistance in that regard. Japan is also keenly following Palestinian efforts to establish a unified Government.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Abdou Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to offer my condolences to our colleague from Turkey and to the Turkish Government and people, who have been put to the test by the earthquake that struck a portion of that country. I also convey our sympathies to the Saudi people, who have just lost their Crown Prince.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is gratified to see you, Madame, assume the presidency of the Security Council for this month. Knowing the commitment of your country, Nigeria, to promoting the ideals of the United Nations, I should like to offer you my warm congratulations.

I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Nawaf Salam, Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, for the exemplary manner in which he steered the work of the Council last month. I express my deep thanks to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his informative briefing.

The Committee remains firmly committed to the holding of political negotiations with a view to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. However, such negotiations must begin on a sound foundation in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. To be frank, negotiation is not an end in itself. In particular connection with the region under discussion today, negotiation should lead to a permanent solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict if the protagonists are all willing to reach one. Our Committee therefore shares the frustration expressed here today in this forum with regard to the current stalemate in the peace process.

We are nevertheless encouraged by the renewed efforts of the Quartet to pave the way to constructive negotiations. In that connection, the statement of 23 September, in which the Quartet proposed a series of measures and a time frame that would make it possible to reach a lasting peace agreement by the end of next year, contains a number of positive elements, including a return to the 1967 borders with land swaps, as well as the minimum requirement of complete cessation of settlement construction and the dismantling of outposts. We hope that the Quartet and the parties will make good use of these principles and will apply them in practice, clearing the difficult path to the resumption of credible and productive negotiations.

While commending the visible efforts of the Quartet to return to serious talks, the Committee believes that, at this time of upheaval, it will be possible to consider a new series of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations only if the principles and other parameters are generally agreed by the parties and guaranteed by the Quartet.

Although our Committee strongly supports the resumption of negotiations, we cannot lose sight of the considerable gap that exists between the political process and the situation on the ground. In fact, there have never been so many Jewish settlements on Palestinian land. Since the Council's most recent public debate on this issue (see S/PV.6590), Israel has approved the construction of 900 housing units in the Har Homa settlement and 1,100 at Gilo, without counting the disclosure in October of the plans for Givat Hamatos, a vast and entirely new settlement of 2,600 housing units in the city of Jerusalem. There are also 1,600 units at Ramat Shlomo, 277 at the Ariel settlement and 100 at Beit Aryeh. The Israeli Government has even created a new committee in order to legalize illicit settlements under Israeli law, while at the same time accelerating the demolition of housing units and the displacement of Palestinians, with 990 persons affected in the month of September alone.

Our Committee has echoed the international community's unanimous condemnation of the Israeli settlements. We must tirelessly recall that these settlements are contrary to the provisions of international law and the Road Map. They jeopardize the peace efforts and are a long-term threat to the bases of a two-State solution. The recent escalation in the coordinated campaign of provocation, desecration and violence carried out by extremist settlers must particularly be condemned. Unfortunately, the Israeli authorities are not responding to this campaign with the rigorous penalties appropriate to such incidents.

The Security Council and the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 should take firm and immediate measures to ensure that international law is respected and to prevent these iniquitous acts from further escalating the violence. It is high time to provide protection for Palestinian civilians against the twofold threat of the establishment of settlements on their land and the excessive violence of the colonists.

I am pleased to note that, since my last statement to the Council (see S/PV.6590), the Palestinian Authority has continued to carry out its programme of institution-building for a functioning State. The Committee has taken note of the request for the admission of Palestine to membership of the United Nations, which the Security Council is currently considering. We call on the Council and the General Assembly to grant this request. The Committee also endorses President Abbas' call on the General Assembly to ask countries that have not yet done so to recognize the Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Furthermore, we express our serious concern over the situation of Palestinian political prisoners. Although the Committee welcomes the recent exchange of prisoners between Israel and Hamas, mediated by Egypt, the Committee calls for the release of all prisoners languishing in Israeli jails.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an extremely sensitive issue of great concern to tens of millions of people in the region and beyond. In the weeks and months to come, the international community should make greater efforts to resolve this issue, demonstrating its political courage and a heightened awareness of its responsibilities. There is a great deal at stake, but we cannot allow another failure. We urge the Council to take action on initiatives to achieve our common goal: the creation of two States living in peace and security within safe and internationally recognized borders. In that regard, I assure the Security Council of the Committee's full cooperation.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Mayr-Harting: I thank you, Madame, for giving me the floor for the first time in my new capacity.

The candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro; the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Albania; as well as the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

At the outset, let me express our deep condolences and sympathies to the people and Government of Turkey for the tragic loss of life in yesterday's earthquake, as well as to the people and Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the passing of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

The events taking place throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa in the past months have taken on truly historic proportions that will not only shape the future of the entire region, but also have repercussions far beyond the countries concerned. The fundamental changes witnessed across the Arab world have made the need for progress in the Middle East peace process all the more urgent. Recent events have indeed shown the necessity of heeding the legitimate aspirations of peoples in the region, including those of Palestinians for statehood and of Israelis for security.

The statements delivered by President Abbas and by Prime Minister Netanyahu at the United Nations a few weeks ago (see A/66/PV.19) were different in many ways, but they coincided in their shared expression of the need to return to negotiations, of support for a two-State solution and of desire for a peaceful and comprehensive resolution of the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The European Union (EU) reiterates its appeal to the parties to resume negotiations under the terms, and within the timelines indicated in, the Quartet statement of 23 September. The European Union welcomes the positive statements of both parties in that regard. The European Union underlines the Quartets crucial role in facilitating the resumption of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians, and recalls its readiness to support all efforts to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. In that regard, the European Union reaffirms its clear positions with regard to parameters, principles and issues, including the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council in December 2009, December 2010, May 2011 and July 2011, as well as the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union at the Security Council on 21 April (see S/PV.6520). The European Union fully supports the Quartet's call on the parties to refrain from provocative actions and to respect the obligations of both parties under the Road Map.

The European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, hosted a meeting of the Middle East Quartet envoys on 9 October in Brussels to follow up on the 23 September Quartet statement. As a result of that meeting, both parties will be invited to another meeting with the Quartet envoys on 26 October in Jerusalem. At that meeting, an agenda for negotiations and working methods will be discussed.

The European Union deplores the recent Israeli decisions to advance settlement expansion in the Gilo and Givat Hamatos settlements, which run counter to the Quartet's efforts. The European Union deplores steps to legalize, under Israeli law, houses in West Bank outposts. The European Union reiterates that settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. All settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, should cease immediately. New construction plans should be abandoned. The European Union also calls upon both sides to avoid steps that run counter to the Quartet's efforts to restart negotiations.

The European Union remains one of the major supporters and contributors to the Palestinian State-building efforts led by President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad. The European Union welcomes the outcome of the reports stating that the Palestinian Authority is above the threshold for a functioning state in the key sectors studied by the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and that Palestinian institutions compare favourably with those in established States. The European Union expects the Palestinian Authority to continue its institution-building efforts and to uphold current standards in terms of transparent and efficient public finance management.

The European Union remains dedicated to continuing its support to the Palestinian Authority's successful State-building efforts. The current fiscal crisis of the Palestinian Authority risks putting in danger the achievements made so far in institution-building. The European Union therefore underlines the necessity of providing predictable and further support to the Palestinian Authority, and calls for equitable burden-sharing by the international donor community. The EU supports the organization of a new donor's conference in Paris, in the context of a relaunch of the peace process.

The European Union welcomes the release of Israeli Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit. His return home after five years of captivity puts an end to the long ordeal that he and his family have endured. The European Union hopes that his release and the related prisoner exchange will have a positive impact on the Middle East peace process, and encourages both sides to continue taking de-escalating steps.

The situation in the Gaza Strip remains of particular concern for the European Union. The crossings must be opened to allow for the flow of humanitarian aid, imports and exports of commercial goods and the movement of people between Gaza and the West Bank, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. The further dismantling of the restrictions on access and movement in the West Bank and Gaza is key for allowing for increased investments and the development of the economy and infrastructure. The European Union recalls its readiness to assist in the reconstruction and economic recovery of Gaza in close partnership with the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government, in line with resolution 1860 (2009) and on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

In conclusion, with regard to Syria, the European Union condemns in the strongest terms the ongoing brutal repression led by the Syrian regime against its population, as well as the widespread human rights violations, including the killing, mass arrest and torture of civilians, peaceful protesters and their relatives that may amount to crimes against humankind. It also condemns actions aimed at inciting inter-ethnic and inter-confessional conflict, as well as recent targeted assassinations of renowned political figures such as Mashaal Tammo. According to the Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, more than 3,000 people, including children, have died since the beginning of the unrest. The European Union deplores those deaths and expresses its condolences to the families of the victims. The European Union demands that the Syrian authorities put an immediate end to the violence in order to prevent further bloodshed. Those responsible for, or associated with, the repression must be held to account by the international community. President Al-Assad must step aside to allow a political transition to take place in Syria.

The European Union is deeply disappointed that the Security Council has not yet been able to adopt a resolution on the current developments in Syria, even after months of ongoing brutal abuses by President Al-Assad and his regime. The European Union will continue to press for strong United Nations action to increase international pressure, and urges all members of the Security Council to assume their responsibilities in relation to the situation in Syria.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mr. Le Hoai Trung (Viet Nam): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Madame President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

My delegation extends its deep condolences to the Government and people of Turkey and to the families of the victims of the earthquake that struck Turkey on Sunday. We also express our deep condolences to the Kingdom and people of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of their Crown Prince.

The Vietnamese delegation wishes to thank you, Madame President, for convening this important debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, on United Nations Day. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

For more than 60 years the region of Middle East has seen many wars and much bloodshed. Millions of Palestinian people remain displaced from their homeland, live under dire circumstances due to the blockade and are subject to violent attack in many forms. The Palestinian people continue to be denied their fundamental and inalienable rights of self-determination, first and foremost among them the right to create an independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

More than a decade ago when the General Assembly met in 1988 to consider the question of Palestine, the Palestinian side presented a plan to advance peace. New circumstances have created new hopes for a just and durable peace settlement in line with the legitimate interests of all parties. Palestine made difficult decisions and, in the words of President Mahmoud Abbas, "decided to adopt the path of relative justice" (*A/66/PV.19*). A clear illustration is the Palestinian agreement to establish the State of Palestine on only 22 per cent of the territory of historical Palestine.

However, the peace process soon reached a stalemate because Israel still refused to become engaged on issues buttressed by international law and numerous United Nations resolutions, and intensified the building of settlements on the territory of the State of Palestine. While we recognize the legitimate concerns of all parties, we trust that the realities of the Middle East over the past six decades now show that those concerns should and can be promoted only in the framework of earnest negotiations covering all of the aforementioned issues.

Viet Nam closely follows developments related to the peace process in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, and strongly supports the struggle and rights of the Palestinian people and all efforts for peace in the region. Given the prolonged stalemate and the continued serious encroachment on the rights of the Palestinian people, and given the strength of the internationally recognized achievements of the Palestinian authorities and people in building their State, President Mahmoud Abbas, on behalf of the State and people of Palestine and in the exercise of their inalienable rights, has submitted the State of Palestine's application for full membership in the United Nations. Viet Nam supports the will of the State and people of Palestine.

Viet Nam also supports negotiations between the parties concerned and welcomes renewed efforts by the Quartet, the League of Arab States, countries of the region and the United Nations to help to promote Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on all core issues. We call for intensified efforts by the international community, in particular the Security Council and the Quartet, to address the current political and humanitarian crisis and to promote a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map, which emphasize, among other things, the principle of land for peace and the right of all States in the region to live in peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Jarman (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to convey our deepest condolences to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Aviation. We also extend our condolences to Turkey in the wake of the recent earthquake, which exacted a heavy toll.

In his regular briefing this morning, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe underscored the growing suffering that the Palestinian people continue to endure as a result of the Israeli authorities' ongoing policies of aggression and occupation. The most serious issue is the Israeli Government's continued campaign to expand its illegal settlements in the heart of Palestinian cities and villages; its demolition, destruction and confiscation of Palestinian homes, properties and land; and its continued siege of the Gaza Strip. We condemn all of those dangerous Israeli practices, which have exacerbated the deteriorating humanitarian plight of the Palestinian people and caused them to hit rock bottom. Those practices have also been a direct reason for the failure of the peace negotiations thus far and the growing state of tension, frustration and instability in the region.

We warn that the continued disregard of the international community for such Israeli actions and unilateral measures will only encourage Israel to pursue its practices aimed at entrenching its occupation of Palestinian land and property. That is especially true of its actions in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, whereby it aims to change the city's demographic, historical and religious nature.

The United Arab Emirates demands that the international community, and especially the Security Council, fully assume their responsibilities now more than ever before. Those include the adoption of all necessary, serious and effective measures to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately cease all settlement activities in the Palestinian territories, nullify all illegal decisions and measures it has taken unilaterally in that regard, and urgently lift its siege of Gaza.

We hope that the international community will enhance the scope of the humanitarian, economic and financial aid offered to the Palestinian people and their National Authority so that they can overcome the great challenges they continue to face.

Today's meeting of the Security Council is of special political significance, as it is follows the

Palestinian Authority's request for the admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations. The United Arab Emirates supports that historic request and entitlement of the Palestinian people, especially in view of the fact that the Palestinian Authority has fulfilled its obligations in establishing the institutions of Palestinian statehood, as recognized by the Quartet and other relevant international organizations.

The United Arab Emirates also hopes that the Council's deliberations will lead it to take the unanimous decision to recommend to the General Assembly the acceptance of the Palestinian application as soon as possible, and in a manner consistent with the positions of the vast majority of the world's countries, which have officially recognized an independent State of Palestine based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and on the basis of the resolutions of international legitimacy, the Madrid Peace Conference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the vision of the two-State solution, as stipulated by the General Assembly in its resolution 181 (II) partitioning Palestine into two States, as well as the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Accepting Palestine's request for admission as a full Member of the United Nations does not at all mean closing the door to the continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations; rather, it would mean a positive step towards supporting efforts to soon resume peace negotiations.

The halt in the negotiations led by the Quartet is due primarily to Israel's failure to abide by the Quartet's work plan. Therefore, the urgent and unconditional resumption of those negotiations is contingent above all on making Israel fully and immediately cease all illegal settlement activity throughout the Palestinian territories, especially East Jerusalem. It will also require a commitment to a clear and specific time frame for those negotiations so as to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on the two-State solution.

We closely followed the most recent prisoner exchange between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. We welcome the efforts made by the sisterly Arab Republic of Egypt in that regard. We demand that Israel immediately and unconditionally release the thousands of prisoners who continue to be held under dire and illegal conditions in Israeli prisons and detention centres. We also stress the importance of the adoption by the international community of the concrete measures necessary to guarantee the protection of Palestinian civilians and ensure accountability for all illegal measures and flagrant violations committed by the occupying Power, in contravention of international humanitarian law and the rights of the Palestinian people.

In closing, we hope that the Security Council will not again hesitate to take the necessary firm measures, under its mandate and responsibilities, to support the efforts to revive a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela would like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing. We support the statement made by His Excellency Ambassador Maged Abdelaziz, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Since 1948, the date of the declaration of the Israeli State, the Palestinian people, humiliated and exploited by the occupying Power, have been expelled from their lands. Today, entire generations of Palestinian citizens continue to pay the high price of exile, alienation and the systematic undermining of their human rights.

The historic decision of the Palestinian authorities to request the Security Council to support its international recognition as a State with full rights in the United Nations is a claim for justice and reaffirmation of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. The Government of the United States has launched a campaign to frustrate recognition of the Palestinian State, making it conditional on the relaunching of direct talks between Israel and Palestine, facilitated by the Quartet. In that way, it seeks to delay or to block the international historic demand calling for the establishment of that State.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela diplomatically recognized the Palestinian State on 27 April 2009. Palestine has all the international legal, political and moral criteria to qualify as a sovereign State, in line with international law. After so many decades of delay, Palestine has established itself as a subject automatically by law in the international community. Through the building of an unjustifiable and racist wall, the imposition of neocolonial settlements, the brutal and ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip and institutionalized violence, Israel is blocking the paths towards a negotiated settlement between the parties.

The Government of Israel currently has in its prisons more than 6,000 prisoners, including more than 280 children, some less than 12 years old. We are dismayed that there are children among those deprived of liberty. That makes clear the inhuman nature of the Government of Israel and those who defend such practices. Such actions, aimed at changing the demographic composition, the nature and the configuration of the Palestinian territories, are in violation of international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the Council and the United Nations.

The Government of Israel has long undermined the principles of the United Nations. International law prevents Israel from invoking conquest and colonization, calling it natural expansion. Therefore, Venezuela once again calls on the Security Council to take the necessary steps to ensure that the State of Israel respects all relevant resolutions and its obligations under international law.

Venezuela reiterates its full support for the recognition of the Palestinian State by the United Nations on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It also supports compensation and the consequent return to their homeland of 50 per cent of the Palestinian population who find themselves dispersed throughout the entire world, in line with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

We pay tribute to the tireless efforts being made by the Government of President Bashar Al-Assad to preserve the unity, integrity and stability of his country, besieged by imperialism. The stability of Syria is fundamental to peace in the Middle East.

Venezuela reiterates the need for Israel to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan, pursuant to resolution 498 (1981) and in respect of resolutions 242 (1968) and 348 (1974). We renew our call to the State of Israel to respect the sovereignty of Lebanon and to avoid further conflict such as took place in July 2006. Only through direct negotiations between the parties, under the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), can constructive solutions be achieved.

There is no excuse for the expulsion of the Palestinian people from their own lands, the frequent indiscriminate bombardment of Lebanon and the occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel. They are flagrant violations of the fundamental principles of humanitarian and international law, unparalleled in modern history.

As our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nicolás Maduros Moros, said when he read out the message of the President of the Republic, Hugo Chávez Frías, before the General Assembly on 27 September:

> "Venezuela hereby affirms its unconditional solidarity with the Palestinian people and its unlimited support for the Palestinian national cause, including, of course, the immediate admission of Palestine to the United Nations as a full Member State." (*A/66/PV.29*)

It is time for the liberation of the Palestinian people, which will come about with the support of the peoples of the world. In his message, President Chávez optimistically predicted that Palestine will live and be victorious. We wish free, sovereign and independent Palestine a long life.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me first to express my condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its people and Government on the passing of the Crown Prince. We would also like to convey our condolences and our solidarity to the people and Government of Turkey, who have been struck by the recent painful earthquake. Both countries are sister nations and neighbours of my country, and all that happens in either country also affects us as if it were happening in Syria. The opposite is also true.

My delegation wishes to express its great appreciation to you, Madame President, for having convened this open meeting to address the situation in the Middle East. This is an important topic, which we debate with the aim of putting an end to Israel's occupation of the Arab territories and its aggressive, inhumane and systematic violations of the rights of those who live there, in contravention of international law and international humanitarian and human rights law. These practices continue with the full knowledge of those who claim to protect those laws.

All of us here know that the item on the agenda today, "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question", is primarily concerned with the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine, and not with other matters that do not fall within the historical definition of the item's title. Unfortunately, instead of merely focusing on the content and objective of this agenda item, attempts are made to introduce other, unrelated subjects in order to weaken the agenda item under discussion, silently ignore the question of Israel's commitment to ending its occupation of the occupied Arab territories, and minimize the importance of the application to the Council for the full membership of Palestine in the United Nations. In this context, we note that the facts show that the events, crises and tensions in our region are closely linked to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Today's exercise arises from efforts to lessen the international political and diplomatic pressure on Israel and certain countries that oppose Palestine's just demands — supported unanimously by the international community — seeking first and foremost the creation of a Palestinian State and an end to the settlement activities. Some countries are attempting to destabilize the region, which would lead to regional war and have a catastrophic effect on all the States of the region, without exception.

How can they do this? The answer is simple. They are inciting various Arab States against one another, under varying pretexts. They are also attempting to change the reality of the Arab world by opening up internal Arab fronts, which in the final analysis can serve only Israel's interests. And in regard to the so-called Arab Spring, the question we should ask is how we can reconcile the beauty of the notion of spring with the bloodshed, war, aggression, hostilities and interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Is this the definition of spring?

We meet today at an important moment in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is unacceptable and incomprehensible that the Security Council should remain idle in the face of Israel's inhumane and aggressive policies. In this context, the Council today has a significant opportunity to prove that it can play its part, as set forth in the Charter, by accepting the just and internationally supported request of Palestine; by recognizing an independent Palestinian State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and by granting it full membership of the United Nations according to international law developed within this Organization through nearly 1,000 resolutions.

Along with implementing policies that are contrary to international law, Israel, the occupying Power, refuses to return the occupied Syrian Golan to Syria and refuses to respect the resolutions of international legitimacy adopted on this matter, especially resolution 497 (1981), which states that the annexation of the occupied Syrian Golan is null, void and illegal. Israel continues to practice terror and oppression against the Syrian authorities under occupation in the Golan. Furthermore, the occupying forces are waging an ongoing campaign to break the ties that link those within the Syrian Golan to their homeland by building the racist wall of separation east of Majdal Shams, in line with the new Israeli political and security policy to undermine any possibility of peace negotiations, including over the occupied Syrian Golan.

We have transmitted to the Secretary-General and the Council official complaints in this matter, calling on the United Nations, particularly the Council, to shoulder their responsibilities and take measures to compel Israel to immediately halt its blatant violations of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly resolution 497 (1981). Today, unfortunately, we reiterate that those calls have not been answered. We were again offended by the absence of any mention in the Under-Secretary-General's briefing of the occupied Syrian Golan.

The achievement of just, comprehensive and lasting peace can come only with Israel's full withdrawal to the 4 June 1967 borders and with the creation of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We must also address the matter of the Palestinian refugees, as stated in General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948. We cannot have partial, phased or delayed solutions to this question. Peace in the region is at a dark impasse due to the arrogance of Israel, supported by the United States and certain European nations that provide unlimited support. This has created a deep sense of frustration and anger among the Arab and Palestinian peoples.

The only obstacle to peace in the region is Israel, and Israeli officials admit this themselves. One example among many are the remarks by Major General Uri Saguy, former head of military intelligence, who took part in the 2000 Shepherdstown talks organized by Bill Clinton, in his recently published book *The Frozen Hand: Why Israel Fears Peace with Syria More Than War*, Mr. Saguy contends that Israel has done everything it could to destroy any settlement with Syria, and that former Prime Minister Ehud Barak aborted the peace process with Syria. We all know that President Clinton addressed this topic in his memoirs, revealing Israel's responsibility for the failure of the negotiations with Syria.

We are very concerned and regretful when we see certain permanent representatives speak on the subject of the Middle East and my country's situation with similar animosity and provocativeness, calling for an uprising against our country's legal Government so as to foment chaos and destabilization and manipulate our people's destiny. We find it strange that those countries that falsely proclaim their desire for Syria's security and stability refuse to encourage national dialogue or serious ongoing comprehensive international reforms in Syria within six months. Along those lines, we would note that to follow up the recent comprehensive reforms in Syria, in recent days my country has established a committee to draft a new, advanced and modern constitution that will reflect the aspirations of the Syrian people. In a few days, a preparatory commission on national dialogue will be established by presidential decree. It will be presided over by Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad himself.

While my delegation will not use this opportunity to reply to statements made by some colleagues, we are nevertheless convinced that today's agenda item has nothing to do with their manipulation and manoeuvres, whose aim is merely to distract attention from the tension resulting from Israel's continued occupation of territories in Palestine, southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan. While the world turns a blind eye to the daily crimes of settlement activities and the violation of law and hundreds of Security Council resolutions, my country strongly condemns the diplomatically inappropriate comments made by the observer of the European Union and a number of other speakers on the subject of my country and its political leadership.

My country respects the principles and ideals of the United Nations and its role as a legal point of reference. We will therefore abstain from responding to the comments to which I have referred, which are beyond the realm of political, diplomatic and courteous convention and violate the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Member States. My delegation will not proceed in that manner against representatives who have judged or criticized our country or characterized the regime in negative terms. Out of respect for our colleagues and for the Security Council, we would prefer to proceed in keeping with appropriate diplomatic and political language.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mrs. Smith (Norway): A debate on the situation in the Middle East and the Palestinian question on United Nations Day, 24 October, is highly symbolic. The bid for Palestinian statehood goes back to the United Nations partition plan of 1947, and even further. In 1949, Norway voted in favour of admitting Israel as a Member State of the United Nations. At the time, we based our decision on the declarations and explanations provided by Israel. Israel had persuasively explained why recognition and membership should not await the resolution of the outstanding final status issues.

Since then, Norwegian policy has been based on the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Norway therefore stands ready to recognize a Palestinian State. Meanwhile, we support all international efforts leading to a comprehensive agreement on the outstanding final status issues, including the recent efforts of the Middle East Quartet to resume substantive talks between the two parties.

Norway has consistently stood by Israel and its inherent right to self-defence in accordance with international law. We have also supported the Palestinian right to statehood and the building of the Palestinian Authority.

At its last meeting in September, the donor support group for the Palestinian Authority affirmed the success of Palestinian institution-building. The performance of Palestinian public institutions was scrutinized by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations. Their joint conclusion was that the Palestinians were fully capable of running a State. Prime Minister Fayyad has succeeded in what he promised two years ago, namely, establishing the necessary institutional foundation for achieving international recognition of Palestinian statehood.

In September, President Abbas reiterated before the General Assembly the need to resolve the final status issues through negotiations (see A/66/PV.19). Moreover, he ensured the General Assembly of the Palestinian Authority's commitment to comply with the Charter of the United Nations, relevant United Nations resolutions, democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

We take note of the Palestinian application for United Nations membership, which the Security Council is now considering. We await the result of the Council's deliberations. If, in due course, the Palestinian authorities decide to go before the General Assembly, Norway will consider all legitimate demands put forward. The recognition of statehood and accession to United Nations membership are issues that are best addressed in the main United Nations bodies here in New York.

A main obstacle to an effective Palestinian State and full institution-building remains the occupation and the continued building of Israeli settlements on the occupied land. Norway is deeply concerned by the grave effects on peace and security of recent plans such as those for Mordot Gilo and Givat Hamatos, as well as other planned settlement expansions. Such measures are rapidly changing the territories around Jerusalem, in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank. They undermine negotiations and may soon render the two-State vision unattainable. The Secretary-General, the General Assembly and the International Court of Justice have all rejected the legality of such unilateral actions.

Norway welcomes the agreement on the release of Gilad Shalit and the exchange of prisoners. The family's long wait is now over. Norway's position all along has been that Shalit's imprisonment was unacceptable, and we have been among the countries actively working for his release. We expect that agreement to have implications for the situation in the West Bank and Gaza over the next few weeks.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of the Kingdom of Morocco, I wish to extend our deep condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on its loss of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. Our deepest condolences and sympathy also go to Turkey following the earthquake that occurred there yesterday.

We extend our gratitude to the President of the Council for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We also thank Mr. Lynn Pasco for his valuable and comprehensive briefing.

Morocco aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Egypt, Kazakhstan and Qatar on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Group of Arab States, respectively.

Today's meeting is taking place only a few weeks after Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas delivered his historic address at the General Assembly (see A/65/PV.19), in which he requested the full membership of the State of Palestine in the United Nations, including recognition of its sovereignty on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Based on our belief in justice and legality as they relate to the question of Palestine — as we stated during this year's general debate (see A/66/PV.25) — my country renews its determination to fully and effectively support the request made by the Palestinian leadership on behalf of the Palestinian people. We hope that the current Security Council consultations on this issue will culminate in the prompt achievement of that goal, especially considering that there is universal consensus on the two-State solution — the States of Palestine and Israel — as well as recognition by many international organizations, especially by this Organization, that the Palestinian institutions and infrastructure are prepared to shoulder the responsibilities of an independent State.

The Palestinian question is at a historic and crucial crossroads, which requires the international community to act responsibly in order to achieve the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people. The impasse in this long peace process does not bode well. It could have a negative and adverse impact on peace and security in the whole region.

That deadlock is the inevitable natural outcome of the policies of force, intransigence and imposition of the status quo pursued by the occupying Power. Instead of dealing in a positive way with the plethora of international initiatives to revive the peace process, the Israeli authorities have intensified their efforts to change the demographic composition of the occupied territories by intensifying their settlement activities, arbitrary arrests, home demolitions and displacement of Palestinian people — including the confiscation of their property, their collective punishment and the excessive use of force against them. The most recent chapter in this devious scheme was Israel's declaration, on 14 October, authorizing the construction of 2,610 new illegal Jewish housing units in East Jerusalem, in an attempt to fragment the new Palestinian State and isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank.

Like the Secretary-General, we are deeply concerned about this dangerous and illegal escalation, which runs counter to all international laws, instruments and norms. As Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, His Majesty King Mohammed VI, along with the Kingdom of Morocco, strongly condemns all attempts to alter the demographic composition of East Jerusalem and change its religious, cultural and historic character.

The Security Council has reiterated time and again that all unilateral actions taken by Israel in East Jerusalem and the other occupied Palestinian territories are illegal. It is time that the Council implements its own resolutions and puts an end to such Israeli practices. The international community, including the United Nations, has the responsibility to take immediate action in accordance with its legal, political and ethical obligations vis-à-vis the Palestinian people, in order to allow them to enjoy their full, legitimate rights. In that connection, we support regional, international and American Administration efforts, as well as those of the European Union, which, in the Quartet statement of 23 September, pledged to revive the peace process, within a specific time frame, as a last option and crucial hope and on the basis of international instruments and terms of reference, as well as United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace process, international law and the Quartet's own Road Map.

The Palestinian Authority and the international community have unquestionably acted with great responsibility and complete respect for negotiations as the basis for efforts to achieve a comprehensive and fair peace. We are convinced that the stability and security of the entire Middle East is inextricably linked to the ability of Palestinians to exercise their political and legal rights. That includes the right to establish an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as the withdrawal of Israel from all other territories occupied since 1967.

The Kingdom of Morocco enjoyed the trust of the international community in representing the African and Arab Groups when it was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the period 2012-2013. We will do everything in our power to enable the Palestinian people to regain their full rights, including to establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as everything in our power to maintain stability and security for all areas and peoples of the Middle East, including Israel.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uganda.

Mr. Ayebare (Uganda): Thank you, Madame President, for organizing this important debate and for presiding over the work of the Security Council this month. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

I wish to convey our deepest condolences and sympathies to the Government and people of Turkey on the loss of life and the destruction of property caused by yesterday's earthquake in eastern Turkey. We also convey our deepest condolences to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

When a peace process becomes as long-drawn-out and protracted as has been the case with the Israeli-Palestinian question, there are times when the parties involved feel frustrated. It is essential for both parties to recommit themselves to the noble objective of reaching a durable solution.

In that regard, Uganda reiterates its call on the Israeli and Palestinian parties to muster the necessary courage to resume negotiations towards a peaceful settlement based on a two-State solution — Israel and Palestine living side by side peacefully and within secure borders.

We welcome the Quartet statement issued in New York on 23 September, in particular the six steps it proposes and the call on the parties to resume negotiations with a view to reaching a final agreement by the end of 2012. Uganda encourages both Israel and Palestine to resume negotiations without further delay.

We also welcome the agreement reached on the exchange of prisoners, brokered by Egypt and Germany, which was announced by Israeli and Palestinian leaders on 11 October. We consider this as an important gesture that can foster greater cooperation.

The continuation of settlement activity, or any other actions that can hamper progress, should be avoided.

On the situation in Gaza, we remain concerned about the dire humanitarian conditions and we reiterate our call for a complete lifting of the blockade on Gaza.

Finally, at this critical juncture, it is important for the Israeli and Palestinian parties, with the support of the international community, to step up their efforts towards the attainment of a two-State solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to congratulate you, Madame President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

We express our deep condolences to the people and Government of Turkey for their losses from the earthquake. We likewise express profound condolences to the people and Government of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of His Highness the Crown Prince.

Cuba associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

It is regrettable that there continues to be no progress in the situation in the Middle East region, in particular with regard to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. The region is still marked by instability and insecurity. The illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories remains the main obstacle to reaching a just, lasting and comprehensive solution in the region.

Cuba demands the immediate cessation of the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories, the settlement activities in Palestinian territory, the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of military force against the defenceless civilian population, and the urgent, unconditional and full lifting of the cruel and illegal blockade of Gaza.

The ovation received by President Mahmoud Abbas's address to the General Assembly at its 16th plenary meeting, on 23 September (see A/66/PV.19), when he announced the presentation to the Secretary-General of a letter of request for Palestinian membership in the United Nations, is evidence of the support by the international community for the Palestinian cause and a recognition of its rights as a State. Cuba fully and strongly supports that request for full membership in the United Nations.

The Security Council must rule on this matter without further delay, and it must do so positively, as is the manifest wish of the overwhelming majority of the States Members of the United Nations.

As the Security Council continues its deliberations, the days go by and thousands of Palestinian political prisoners, including children, women and elected officials, suffer humiliations in Israeli prisons. Since 27 September last, thousands of Palestinian political prisoners have been on a hunger strike, protesting the deterioration of their conditions in detention and the actions of the occupying Power. Regrettably, the Israeli prison authorities have responded by taking additional punitive measures against the strikers.

The letters dated 10 October 2011 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2011/629) state that:

> "Israel has continued its inhumane treatment of Palestinian prisoners and detainees via a series of illegal and harsh measures, such as collective punishment, which includes forcing them to live in unsanitary and unhygienic conditions; denial of health care; restrictions on family visits; solitary confinement for long periods of time, with some held in isolation for at least 10 years; deprivation of the prisoners' right to education; forced night-time searches of prisoners' cells; and denial of due process. In addition to such measures, in violation of the prisoners' basic human rights, the occupying Power continues to subject Palestinian prisoners and detainees to all forms of psychological and physical maltreatment, such as cuffing their feet and hands, measures of humiliation and intimidation,

forced interrogations and, in many cases, torture."

The international community, particularly the Security Council, cannot remain indifferent. The Council and the General Assembly must take practical measures to ensure that Israel puts an end to those policies, which are carried out deliberately, in violation of international humanitarian law and of human rights, including the Geneva Conventions.

Cuba reaffirms once again that all such measures and actions, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, represent violations of international law and agreements and of the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations. Cuba demands Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

Cuba reiterates once again its position in favour of a just and lasting peace for all peoples of the region of the Middle East that will put an end to the occupation of all Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967 and guarantee the exercise of the self-determination of the Palestinian people by establishing an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Ali (Bangladesh): Madam President, I should like to begin by thanking your country, Nigeria, and you personally for steering this very important open debate on the situation in the Middle East. At the outset, I express our sincere condolences at the demise of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. We also express our condolences at the loss of life and property in the recent earthquake in Turkey.

I convey our appreciation to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing this morning.

The Bangladesh delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Egypt and Kazakhstan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively. In addition, I wish to briefly make certain points that Bangladesh believes to be of importance.

In order to achieve a lasting solution in the Middle East, it is very important to address the key issue, which is the prolonged and illegal occupation of the Arab territories by Israel. We believe that the occupying Power should immediately cease its continued settlement activity, which remains the key blockage to the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

We commend President Mahmoud Abbas's leadership of the Palestinian Authority and the continued Palestinian State-building efforts, especially in the areas of governance, the rule of law and human rights, livelihoods, productive sectors, education and culture, health and so on.

We are concerned, however, at the destruction by the occupying Power of properties, homes and economic institutions, and the construction of the Wall, contrary to international law, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, which have hampered the already critical socio-economic situation that the Palestinian population faces. We are also worried because of the Israeli military operations and the continuing Israeli policy of closures and severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods, including humanitarian personnel as well as food, medical, and other essential supplies, in the Gaza Strip, which are causing civilian casualties, and we therefore call for maximum restraint with respect for international humanitarian law.

We express our concern at the inhumane treatment of Palestinian prisoners languishing in Israeli jails. My delegation is pleased, however, at the recent Egyptian-brokered prisoner-exchange deal under which Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit has been released in exchange for more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners.

My delegation believes that the Fourth Geneva Convention, the relevant General Assembly resolutions, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), the principle of land for peace and the Madrid Conference terms of reference, which guarantee Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories back to the line of 4 June 1967, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative are the best guides for achieving a two-State solution.

The principled support of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination from all

corners of the globe, both bilaterally and multilaterally, has been an essential pillar of Palestinian resilience over the decades. My delegation welcomes in this regard Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's speech of 23 September 2011 (see A/66/PV.19) before the General Assembly and his formal submission to the Secretary-General of an application for United Nations membership. It is also heartening to note that more than 130 countries have recognized the State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders. It would therefore be morally befitting for this body to unanimously respect the will of the majority of the Member States and to endorse the application of Palestine.

Let me now turn to the situations in Lebanon and in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. We call upon the concerned parties to fully respect the sovereignty of Lebanon and to cease continuous breaches of resolution 1701 (2006). We further demand that the occupying State immediately halt its actions to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights in accordance with resolution 497 (1981).

In conclusion, let me reiterate the long-standing position of Bangladesh that the continued illegal occupation of Palestine over the past six decades is the root cause of violence, unrest and destabilization in the region. Let me also reiterate our full support for a lasting peace for all inhabitants of the region, both Arabs and Israelis, and our strong commitment to the realization of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side and in peace with all its neighbours.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Ms. Gunnarsdóttir (Iceland): Let me first turn to the situation in Syria and Yemen before discussing the question of Palestine.

With regard to Syria, we were very disappointed by the veto on the draft resolution presented to the Council earlier this month (see S/PV.6627). We are concerned that the use of the veto in such cases is not conducive to peace and security in the region. On the contrary, it can further undermine international efforts while the situation continues to deteriorate. We call upon the Council to revisit the situation in Syria as soon as possible.

With regard to Yemen, we welcome the Council's adoption of resolution 2014 (2001) last Friday (see S/PV.6634). Iceland strongly supports the condemnation of human rights abuses and calls for the end of violence. We also welcome the Council's reference to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security. We urge the Government of Yemen to implement the resolution in full.

The Security Council has found itself at the centre stage of the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by having been entrusted with the application of Palestine for membership in the United Nations. The Council's deliberations on the application take place in an environment where peace negotiations, which have been ongoing for almost two decades, are at a standstill with no tangible results. We speak of an environment in which there is not a viable plan in sight that might draw the parties back to the negotiating table and in which the current situation is unsustainable, because an occupation is inherently unsustainable.

At the same time, under the difficult circumstances of the occupation, the Palestinian National Authority has successfully implemented its economic and development programme and has now demonstrated clearly, by improving infrastructure and through institution-building, that Palestine can stand on its own feet. Their efforts and accomplishment have been applauded by the international community, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

In July, Iceland informed the Council of its intention to support the Palestinians should they decide to bring their case to the United Nations. In his statement during the general debate in September, the Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs informed the General Assembly of the determination of the Icelandic Government to fully recognize Palestine (see A/66/PV.26). I am pleased to inform the Council that the Government of Iceland has taken steps at the domestic level towards the recognition of Palestine by putting forward a proposal for a parliamentary resolution on the recognition of Palestine as an independent and sovereign State within the pre-1967 borders. That proposal is currently being discussed by the Foreign Relations Committee of our Parliament.

As many others have said before us, we see no contradiction between Palestine seeking membership in the United Nations and the Quartet-led peace process, which we fully support. Let me reiterate Iceland's position that it is of the utmost importance that a negotiated agreement should be based on the two-State solution, where both parties can live in peace with their neighbours.

Iceland urges the members of the Council to contribute to the realization of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people by recommending to the General Assembly that Palestine be accepted as the 194th State Member of the United Nations. That would allow Palestine to follow in the footsteps of the numerous other Member States that owe their freedom and independence from colonialism to this very Organization and to the determination of many of its Members to ensure that the principles on which the Organization was established override other interests.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Tarar: (Pakistan): Thank you, Madame President, for convening today's debate. We also extend our compliments to the delegation of Nigeria for its able leadership of the Security Council.

We express our deepest condolences and sympathies to Turkey on the human and material toll exacted by the earthquake.

We mourn the passing of His Royal Highness Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Crown Prince, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

We align ourselves with the statements delivered by the Permanent Representatives of Egypt and Kazakhstan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

Precisely one month after the general debate, during which our top leaders reiterated their collective objective of finding a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, today's meeting of the Council comes amidst renewed hope for lasting peace in the region. The impressive march of the Palestinian people towards statehood has reached an important milestone with the application for United Nations membership. We hope that the Security Council will conclude favourably its deliberations on Palestine's application. Affirmative action by the Security Council and by the General Assembly will set the foundation for a lasting solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It will be a step towards rectifying the historical injustices suffered by the Palestinian people.

The agreement reached between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities on prisoners also bodes well for prospects for peace. We felicitate the families of all prisoners released as a result of that agreement, which proves the all disputes and differences can be resolved amicably through negotiations. It is our sincere hope that the agreement will not only lead to the release of more Palestinian prisoners but that it will also reinforce the value of finding mutually acceptable compromises.

For lasting peace in the region, it is incumbent upon the Security Council and the Middle East Quartet to honour their longstanding commitments to a final settlement and to work in tandem to achieve that goal. The Quartet's statement of 23 September was positive in intent. However, the Quartet's initiative was neutralized by the Israeli decision to build new settlements in the occupied territories. This is cause for serious concern. Settlement activity is a clear violation of international law and a manifestation of Israel's expansionist policy. Settlement activity and the peace process are mutually exclusive. We call upon the Israeli authorities to cease new settlement activity unconditionally to help resume peace negotiations. We also call for an easement in the blockade of Gaza.

I conclude by reiterating our support for the full membership of Palestine in the United Nations. Only a strong State of Palestine as a responsible member of the international community can guarantee peace for itself and for its neighbours.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kohona (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers to commend you, Madam President, for convening this important debate. Let me also express my sincere condolences to the Government of Saudi Arabia on the tragic passing away of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

The delegation of Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

This is a timely opportunity to focus on the situation in the Middle East, particularly the question of Palestine, a question that has occupied the attention of the Security Council for a long time. The developments since our last opportunity to discuss the issue are particularly important.

A peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue will be one of the defining achievements of this century. It will reflect our collective will and responsibility to help resolve a question that has occupied the attention of this Council and the United Nations system for several decades.

While the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine remains a laudable goal for the United Nations, it is an existential necessity for the Palestinian people.

Sri Lanka's position with regard to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people remains consistent. We hope that the application for admission of the State of Palestine to full membership in the United Nations will receive sympathetic consideration.

Sri Lanka has consistently supported a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue and called for the implementation of General Assembly resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution. Our sincere wish is that Israel, Palestine and their neighbours coexist in peace and harmony. Realizing the two-State solution would be the greatest investment in peace in the region in our time.

Sri Lanka has called upon all parties to ensure a climate conducive to finding a way forward towards the two-State solution, which is the only sustainable solution. The key players in the Middle East peace process have called upon all parties to scrupulously meet their obligations under the peace agreement.

The resolution of the issue of Palestinian political prisoners in Israel is critical to a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and as a confidence-building measure. Sri Lanka welcomes the recent exchange of prisoners between the two parties. It is a measure that will generate positive momentum for peace talks.

My Government is pleased to note the several important developments that have occurred on the ground in the midst of continued international efforts to create conditions for the early resumption of negotiations by Israel and Palestine. Palestine has been successfully striving to complete its State-building programme, which has been endorsed by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United Nations and others, as well as by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Brussels in June and in New York in September. There has been internal reconciliation between the relevant local political stakeholders, who have united to pursue their common aspirations.

It is our sincere hope that the issues before the Council today will be addressed in a just and equitable manner that will encourage the search for peace. I take this opportunity to commend the work that has been carried out by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, for all these years amid many odds, to assist millions of Palestinian people in need, especially the people of Gaza.

Sri Lanka wishes to reiterate its support for the Palestinians quest for their legitimate human and national rights. The Government and the people of Sri Lanka would like to reassure the Council of our continued support and solidarity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Khan (Indonesia): First of all, I would like to convey our condolences to the Government and the people of Turkey in the aftermath of the severe earthquake that hit the eastern part of their country. Our condolences also go to the Government of Saudi Arabia upon the passing of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, who died last Saturday.

We further express our deep appreciation to you, Madam President, and other members of the Security Council for arranging this debate at this critical moment in the history of the struggle of the Palestinian people. We are grateful also to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his comprehensive briefing.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and with the statement to be made by the representative of Kazakhstan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

On 23 September 2011, President Mahmoud Abbas submitted to the Secretary-General an application for membership in the United Nations. Without a doubt, it was a historic occasion. Indonesia is proud to have stood by the people of Palestine and to continue to stand by them. Indonesia continues to be an unrepentant advocate of the Palestinian cause because it is the right thing to do. We call upon this Council to expedite the process and issue its recommendation without delay.

Indonesia supports the resumption of negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, as proposed by the Quartet on 23 September. That means resumption of direct bilateral negotiations without delay or preconditions. There must be a preparatory meeting between the parties to determine the agenda and the method to be adopted for the negotiations, as well as an agreement on a timeframe that will not extend beyond the end of 2012.

We wish to express our appreciation to those Member States who have thrown their support behind the Palestinian bid for membership, including members of the Non-Aligned Movement and the OIC. We do not think it is sufficient for anyone simply to express bland support for the two-State vision, while failing to provide practical support for the Palestinian need to obtain what is justly theirs.

Regrettably, the Government of Israel continues its diplomatic offensive designed to frustrate the progress of Palestinians. The objective of this offensive is really to perpetuate the absence of a peace process.

Palestinian membership of the United Nations is not in contradiction with the two-State solution, nor does it constitute an obstacle to peace. The true obstacle to peace lies in the same failed policies of the Government of Israel, beginning with its settlement activities.

We support the recent release of political prisoners by the parties, which we hope will lead to the resumption of the peace process. It is distressing that since the Israeli occupation began in 1967, at least 750,000 Palestinian civilians, including women, children and elected officials, have been detained and imprisoned by Israel. We draw attention, in this regard, to last May's Declaration on Palestinian Political Prisoners adopted by the sixteenth Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Bali, Indonesia, in which the Movement called for urgent attention to be paid to the grave situation of these prisoners. We look forward to their being set free.

Finally, Indonesia reiterates its fundamental support for Palestine as well as the two-State solution. We look forward to the resumption of the peace process without unnecessary delay.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Sin Son Ho (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Let me begin by joining with previous speakers in expressing deep condolences and sympathy to the victims of the powerful earthquake in Turkey and their families. My delegation also takes this opportunity to express deep condolences for the passing of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Aviation, and Inspector General of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, my delegation has received the sad news from the Pakistani Mission on the passing of Nusrat Bhutto, former Chairperson of the Pakistan's People Party, Government minister and the mother of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. In this regard, my delegation expresses its deep condolences.

It is my honour to speak before the Security Council with regard to the Palestinian question. I wish to thank the Nigerian delegation for its timely convening of this important meeting of the Security Council. Allow me also to associate myself with the statement made by Ambassador Maged Abdelaziz, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

More than 60 years have passed since the international community launched its efforts to settle the Palestinian and Middle East problem, which was set off by Israeli occupation of the Arab territories in 1948. Nevertheless, no significant progress has yet been made. The Palestinian lands and other Arab territories remain under Israel's military occupation. The use of armed force, the expansion of settlements and the blockade of the Gaza Strip continue to prevail. This reality urgently requires the international community to find the earliest possible solution to the Middle East problem. The core element here is the solution of the Palestinian question as soon as possible. There can be no lasting peace and security in the Middle East and the Arab world unless the Palestine issue is completely resolved.

On 23 September, during the general debate of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session, President Abbas of Palestine formally submitted an application for the full membership of Palestine in the United Nations. This event of great significance received overwhelming support from the international community.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea officially recognized Palestine as a State in 1988, and since then has extended unreserved support and solidarity to the struggle of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is fully committed to standing firmly with the Palestinian and Arab people in their struggle for their just cause until their final victory and the problem's final solution. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea unreservedly supports Palestine's full membership of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mrs. Aitimova (Kazakhstan): I have the pleasure to deliver the following statement on behalf of the members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in my country's capacity as Chair of the 57-member OIC group.

At the outset, I should like to express to Turkey our sympathy and deepest condolences over the devastating earthquake that struck the country on Sunday, killing residents and causing widespread damage. Let me also extend our shared sorrow to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia over the demise of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Aviation. He was known not only for his outstanding service to his nation, but equally for his remarkable role in supporting the progress of Islamic solidarity.

The Palestinian question remains a defining issue of global justice and a pressing challenge for the international community, and the Security Council in particular. It is upsetting and painful to watch the Palestinian people as they continue to await the transformation of the long-standing political commitments and resolutions of the Security Council into actual practice, which would inspire hope and confidence in support for rightful causes and in defence of the values and principles for which the United Nations Organization was found.

Our debate today is of extraordinary importance, given that it coincides with world awareness of and attention focused on the Security Council's expected decision on the Palestinian bid for membership of the United Nations. At such a defining time in history as the Palestinian bid is being considered, we cannot fail to take this opportunity to appeal to this forum to reach the constructive and positive decision we are hoping for. Such a decision, once made, will be a secure foundation thereafter for the preservation of peace, security and justice, and enhance the opportunity for a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, based on the two-State solution.

It has become very clear that Palestine's resort to the United Nations to gain its rights as a recognized State does not negate the Palestinians' firm commitment to resolving the conflict through peaceful means. Rather, it confirms the principled peaceful approach that has been repeatedly and clearly emphasized by the Palestinian President, including at his most recent speech to the General Assembly (see A/66/PV.19).

The OIC group aspires to justice and equality in respect of the rightful cause of Palestine. It also remains firm in its conviction that the Security Council must actively contribute to, proclaim and materialize the Palestinians' inalienable rights, including the rights of return and self-determination, as well as their legitimate national aspirations to freedom, prosperity, peace and justice in their independent, sovereign State of Palestine based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The OIC also joins the international community position in reaffirming that all measures and actions taken by Israel to alter the legal and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, and to impose jurisdiction and administration there, have no legal basis. The OIC reiterates its demand that Israel abide fully and immediately by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, as also reflected in resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Amidst the efforts undertaken by international actors to revive a credible political process, Israel, the occupying Power, continues to commit violations, undertake unilateral actions and impose unlawful policies in the West Bank. Likewise, the OIC remains deeply concerned over the situation in East Jerusalem, where Israel persists in intensifying a systematic process of altering the historical Arab-Islamic identity of the holy city and changing its demographic composition. Such violations seek to completely change the realities on the ground and eventually isolate occupied East Jerusalem from its Palestinian surroundings.

Both in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, Israel continues to construct new settlement units, destroying houses, displacing and detaining Palestinians, confiscating lands and properties, building the apartheid wall, and carrying out excavations underneath the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque. If left unchecked, those violations will certainly pose a threat to stability and security, heighten tensions, undermine the viability of the two-State solution and have far-reaching negative consequences on the life of the Palestinians. In that regard, the Security Council has a vital role to play in compelling Israel to abide by, and end its flagrant breaches of, international law.

The illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip remains in force, despite Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) of 8 January 2009. Bearing that in mind, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) cannot accept any report that would either whitewash attacks on humanitarian convoys or condone the illegal blockade against Palestinian civilians. Accordingly, we call on the Security Council to take responsibility for putting an end to this illegal blockade on Gaza, for protecting justice and humanity and for preventing further human rights violations.

The imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, who are being held in 22 Israeli prisons and detention facilities and who launched a general hunger strike on 27 September, remind the world of one of the many injustices against the Palestinian people. In that regard, we demand that the Security Council shoulder its responsibilities in addressing the practices of the Israeli Government, which contradict the principles and laws of the international community, and in pressuring Israel to release Palestinian political prisoners without any preconditions. In that context, I would like to welcome the recent prisoner exchange.

The time has come to acknowledge and adopt a rightful and historic resolution that recognizes the independent State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders, an action that would provide the cornerstone for the establishment of stability, prosperity, peace and security for Palestine, Israel and other neighbouring countries of the region. We hope that the Quartet will succeed in implementing the Road Map in accordance with the agreed terms of reference, as reflected in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the full support and solidarity of OIC with the Palestinian people in their endeavours to regain their legitimate and inalienable national rights, including the right of return, the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank you, Sir, for having convened this important meeting of the Security Council to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We also wish to thank Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

We align ourselves with the statements made by Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, Kazakhstan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and Qatar on behalf of the Arab Group. The eyes of the international community are now focused on the Security Council and whether it will take a historic stand on the Palestinian request for full membership in the United Nations. That request was made after a long delay and with due entitlement, particularly since more than 130 countries, representing a majority of two thirds of the Member States, already recognize the Palestinian State.

The peoples and the States of the region have high hopes that the international community, in general, and the Security Council, in particular, will assume their political, legal and moral responsibilities in supporting Palestine's request for membership in the United Nations. They also hope that rights will be restored to their owners and that the Palestinian people will realize their right to self-determination and their legitimate aspiration to have a sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the framework of the 4 June 1967 borders and in accordance with internationally legitimate resolutions, in particular the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Needless to say, that there is one party that pays no attention to international legitimacy, nor does it heed the resolutions of the Security Council, or international or humanitarian laws. While the entire world is demanding that the parties return to the negotiating table and halt all provocative unilateral activities that undermine the chances of success in the peace process, Israel persists in its intransigence and arrogance, and continues its illegal and aggressive actions through an illegal expansionist settlement campaign. At the same time, it ignores all appeals by the family of nations to stop the settlement activity, revive the peace process and resume negotiations so as to achieve the two-State solution.

Perhaps the latest decision by the Israeli Government to build 1,100 new illegal settlement units on occupied Palestinian territories supplies further proof of Israel's arrogance and its lack of seriousness in reaching out towards the option of peace. In that regard, we would like to draw attention to the harassment being suffered by the Palestinians, including the elderly, children and women, at the hands of armed Israeli settlers, whose destructive hands have also reached houses of worship and destroyed mosques, farms and trees in the occupied territories. The State of Kuwait appeals to the international community not to stand idle in the face of the criminal Israeli actions that violate all international norms, agreements and instruments. We also call for providing the necessary protection for defenceless Palestinians in Palestinian territories.

While we welcome the recent release of a number of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, we also demand the release of the remaining prisoners and detainees and call for the deployment of an international fact-finding mission to examine the conditions in Israeli jails and the extent to which Israel adheres to the rules of international law.

The blockade imposed on Gaza continues. There is no doubt that this represents another violation by Israel of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949. Instead of protecting Palestinian civilians, the occupation authorities subject them to collective punishment, which has exacerbated and led to the deterioration of the economic, social and humanitarian situations in the Gaza Strip. The frightening statistics resulting from this blockade are no longer surprising, such as the unemployment rate, which stands at 65 per cent. We cannot ignore Israel's occasional air raids against populated Palestinian areas, an act that qualifies as terroristic and should be condemned.

My country renews its demand for Israel's compliance with Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which calls for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan and its withdrawal to the line of 4 June 1967. We emphasize that Israel's continued occupation of part of the territory of the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic poses a real obstacle to achieving peace and security in the Middle East.

In regard to the situation in Lebanon, the State of Kuwait reaffirms its commitment to stand beside the sisterly Republic of Lebanon and supports efforts to maintain its security and preserve the integrity of its territories. My country also demands that Israel immediately cease its continued violations of Lebanon's territory and air space and that it comply with Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and withdraw completely from Lebanese territory.

We would like to stress that the peoples and States of the region follow the meetings of the Security Council regarding the Palestinian request for full United Nations membership with great interest and hope. Given that all of the international initiatives, settlements and resolutions call for a two-State solution, we therefore appeal to the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and oblige Israel to halt its illegal settlement activities and to resume negotiations in order to achieve a two-State solution, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1860 (2009), the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me at the beginning to express my gratitude to you, Madame President, for having convened this important meeting at a time of significant developments in the Middle East and the Muslim world.

Popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa demonstrate a pressing need for change. The aspiration of peoples to democracy, the rule of law and independence, as well as their affection for Islamic values, cannot simply be overruled. We believe that addressing the legitimate demands of the people through a peaceful political process and away from foreign interventions is the only way out of crisis and to avoid violence.

The Palestinian bid to become a full member of the United Nations will soon come up for decision. For the past six decades, the Palestinian people have lived under the most severe pressure and atrocities of the Israeli regime. All negotiations with the occupying regime have so far proved futile, while the continued inaction of the Security Council has made the regime more audacious in pursuing its inhuman policies. In past decades, the veto power was used at least 46 times to defeat draft resolutions condemning Israel. The question is how to consolidate our efforts in order to secure the inalienable and inherent rights of the Palestinians, including their right of return, and to ensure the establishment of an independent and viable State in all the Palestinian territories and that the membership of Palestine, as a full-fledged State, is realized.

Last week's release of a noteworthy number of Palestinian prisoners brought a wave of joy to the occupied territories and among freedom-loving people of the world. Yet, there are disturbing reports on the worsening situation of Palestinian political prisoners and detainees being illegally imprisoned and detained by the Israeli regime, in violation of international law, including international humanitarian law. Hence, we should not forget that the conditions of the more than 6,000 Palestinian civilians, including at least 280 children and 38 women, as well as 22 elected officials, who continue to be imprisoned or arbitrarily detained by the Israeli regime. We hope that the efforts to secure the release of those prisoners would continue.

In addition to concerns about the deteriorating situation of Palestinian prisoners, we are disturbed by reports in recent weeks confirming the escalation of acts of violence and terrorism against Palestinian civilians and their properties in the occupied Palestinian territory perpetrated by illegal Israeli settlers, many of whom are armed. The burning of the Qusra mosque, the desecration of mosques in the Palestinian villages, the uprooting of trees, burning agricultural land and the constant harassment and humiliation of Palestinians, including children, on a daily basis are but a few examples of such a brutality by settlers. Such illegal actions by Israeli settlers occur in full view of the occupying forces, who take no action to hold those settlers accountable for their crimes and continue to offer them impunity and protection while they carry out such crimes.

These examples constitute further confirmation of the dire situation that prevails in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which requires the international community's urgent attention. The Israeli regime must be held responsible for its illegal and provocative acts. The international community cannot continue to stand idly by as the Israeli regime continues to colonize the Palestinian territory, allowing its illegal settlers to rampage unbridled and to incrementally continue its violations of international law, thereby upholding its record of war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations.

With regard to the situation in Syria, my delegation wishes to emphasize that, taking into account the multi-ethnic Syrian society and the exceptional geopolitical situation of Syria, any foreign intervention in the domestic affairs of Syria and fomenting divisions and sectarian differences among the people would jeopardize peace and stability in the whole region. The people in Syria realize that the key to their independence and dignity is to keep their ranks united and to remain steadfast in their resistance and struggle against Israeli occupation and aggression.

On Lebanon, the Israeli regime has continued its violations of the land, sea and air space of Lebanon and refuses to withdraw from Lebanese occupied villages. Such occupations and acts of aggression should stop immediately.

Before concluding, I would like to react to the allegations against my country in the statement delivered this morning by the representative of the Israeli regime. It is no wonder that, by levelling baseless allegations with regard to terrorism and Iran's nuclear programme, the Zionist regime has preposterously attempted, once again, to misuse the main debate at this Chamber and to deflect attention from its long and dark catalogue of crimes and atrocities, such as occupation, aggression, militarism, State terrorism and crimes against humanity, as reflected in the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48) and the report on the Marmara incident.

On the ridiculous accusation of the so-called plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador in Washington, it is very clear to us that that story has been ineptly fabricated to implicate Iran. That is a pre-planned scenario, supported by the Israeli regime, on the assumption that the end is its main beneficiary. With more than 6,000 years of history and civilization, the Iranian nation has never engaged and will not engage in such a despicable attempt. Such an operation, if true in nature, could only be planned and carried out by such a regime, whose short history is full of assassinations of its opponents, even high-ranking officials of other States. So I do not even tax the patience of the members of the Council to delve into it and to respond to such baseless allegations made by the representative of such a criminal regime.

On the nuclear issue, I should say that the Israeli regime's clandestine development and unlawful possession of hundreds of nuclear warheads and a nuclear weapons arsenal are the only and single threat to regional and international peace and security. The Israeli regime has clearly defied the demand of the overwhelming majority of United Nations Member States that have, time and again, called on that regime to renounce nuclear weapons and to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Regrettably, the inaction of the relevant United Nations organs in dealing with such Israeli policies and practices has emboldened that dangerous regime. Indeed, peace and stability cannot be achieved in the Middle East, where the massive Israeli nuclear arsenal continues to threaten the region and beyond.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Madame President, for convening this meeting. I also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

At the outset, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the King, Government and people of our sister Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and to the Arab and Muslim nations on the passing of His Royal Highness, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Aviation Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. I also offer my deep sympathies to sisterly Turkey and its people in the wake of the devastating earthquake there, which has claimed many lives and inflicted great material damage.

In every position it has taken on the Middle East, the Kingdom of Bahrain has supported all efforts aimed at achieving a peaceful settlement of the Middle East question on the basis of a two-State solution in which Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security, with Palestine guaranteed as a viable, independent State within the 1967 borders. We continue to play an active role on the Arab Peace Initiative Committee, believing it to be the best framework within which to achieve a peaceful settlement.

In his address to the General Assembly during the general debate, His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa of Bahrain said that

> "Today more than ever, the international community has a propitious opportunity to do justice to the brotherly Palestinian people and to help them to achieve their legitimate aspirations by recognizing an independent Palestinian State on their own national soil, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That would put an end to an era of bitter Arab-Israeli conflict, contingent on a complete Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories to the lines of 4 June 1967 in Palestine, the occupied Syrian Arab Golan and the occupied territories in southern Lebanon, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative". (*A/66/PV.15, p. 8*)

It no longer makes sense to continue to address the Palestinian question in a routine manner. The international community must take a bolder step forward, not only in order to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people but, more importantly, to see justice done after so many decades of occupation and unilateral attempts to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question. The whole world, and the Quartet in particular, has seen the Palestinian Authority make repeated concessions in its efforts to attain its inalienable and legitimate rights, chief among them the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, even as the international situation evolves within this Organization. However, the fine diplomacy and flexibility demonstrated has been greeted by nothing but more settlement and displacement activities, without regard for all the international resolutions prohibiting such activities.

I remind the Council of what we have already heard in previous meeting — the Palestinian Authority is capable of managing State affairs, as has been acknowledged by the World Bank, the International

Monetary Fund, and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. The Palestinian Authority has proved its ability to establish sound institutions and provide security for a viable State. We pay tribute to President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad for this achievement, whereby the Palestinian Authority has attained the goal it set itself two years ago. This should be considered when the Palestinian Authority's request for Palestine's full membership of the United Nations is being addressed. We therefore encourage the Organization, the Security Council and the international community to accede to their request.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Jerandi (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you and your country, Madame President, on Nigeria's presidency this month and commend you on your excellent management of the Council's work. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing on the latest developments in the region.

I would like to express my deep condolences to the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. May he rest in peace. I would also like to extend my deep sympathies to the sisterly Republic of Turkey in the wake of the earthquake that has claimed hundreds of lives there.

I would also like to express our great gratitude to all those who have congratulated Tunisia and its people on the historic elections held in my country on 23 October, as well as our appreciation for the warm support they have offered us on their countries' behalf.

Tunisia associates itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the Arab Group by the Permanent Representative of Qatar, as well as the statements made by the representative of Kazakhstan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and by the representative of the sisterly Republic of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The international community finds itself once more at an important moment in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially with regard to the Palestinian cause. Despite the readiness shown by the Palestinian side to reinvigorate the peace process and work to reach appropriate and final solutions to the outstanding issues, we are once again seeing Israel set up new obstacles that will undoubtedly hinder the resumption of negotiations and could undermine international efforts aimed at breaking a stalemate that has lasted too long and that may lead to the exacerbation of tension, frustration and violence in the region.

Here, we note Israel's recent unilateral actions, undertaken in complete disregard for and defiance of united international opinion and the efforts of influential and active parties in the peace process, especially those of the members of the Quartet, whose statement of 23 September (SG/2178) included a time frame for the resumption of dialogue and negotiations, and stressed the importance of both sides implementing their obligations under the Road Map. First and foremost of those is a complete halt to settlement activity.

Israel's unilateral actions include its announcement on 14 October of its intention to build 2,610 new housing units in Beit Safafa in East Jerusalem, destroying Palestinian homes, evicting their residents and leaving them homeless. Israel has already demolished 31 residences since the beginning of the year, leaving 106 Palestinians homeless, including 61 children. Israel's actions also include the ongoing Judaization of the holy city of Jerusalem and stripping it of its Arab and Islamic character, as well as the continuing isolation of Palestinian territories in order to create a fait accompli on the ground that suits Israel's interests and objectives. Those and other examples clearly reflect the Israeli occupation authorities' ongoing violations of international law and treaties, including the peace process terms of reference, the Road Map, the outcome of the Madrid Peace Conference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

On 14 October, the Secretary-General issued a statement (see SG/SM/13879) in which he expressed his deep concern over the continued settlement activity. He also renewed his call to end such activity and affirmed that any unilateral actions on the ground by Israel would not be recognized by the international community, but would be considered null and void and without legal effect, pursuant to the Road Map and the agreements that have been concluded.

During the morning part of this meeting, we heard clear and honest statements from delegations indicating that Israel could not continue its settlement activities. In addition, Tunisia strongly condemns the ongoing unjust siege imposed on the Gaza Strip and the repeated acts of aggression carried out against it. We also condemn Israel's oppressive measures to limit the freedom of the Palestinian people and their rights to transportation, work, shelter, health and education. Their tragic suffering has been made worse by the current unjust policies of the Israeli occupation authorities.

Tunisia will maintain its principled and firm position in support of the efforts of the brotherly Palestinian people to achieve a just, permanent and comprehensive solution that ends the suffering of our Palestinian people, restores their national legitimate right to self-determination and establishes an independent sovereign State on their land, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Government and people of Tunisia strongly support the Palestinian application for full United Nations membership and consider that as a legitimate right based on firm historic, moral and objective foundations. Given the most fundamental rule of justice and its minimum requirement, a people have a right to regain freedom lost decades ago. Equally, they have the right to enjoy sovereignty over their own land.

It is also important that Palestine be granted full United Nations membership, as international and regional organizations and financial institutions have agreed that Palestine possesses the requisite elements of statehood in terms of administration and institutions and the ability to manage them. Tunisia therefore calls upon the members of the Council to support the legitimate request of Palestine.

Moreover, Tunisia steadfastly supports the principles of international legitimacy and peace. We therefore call for support for negotiations and dialogue to achieve peace. At the same time, we call for efforts to avoid a return to stalemate and tension, which would only threaten peace and security in the region and limit the prospects for the peace to which we all aspire.

As today's discussion has been on the Middle East, I renew my country's call for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, in accordance with international law, so that all of the peoples of the region can enjoy peace and security and focus their attention on development and on building a better future.

The Tunisian people have taken to the streets in neighbourhoods throughout the entire country before and after Palestine submitted its request for full United Nations membership. In addition, the interim Government has continued to clearly express its unconditional support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. I wish to reiterate here that this is a principled position that will not be changed, as it has emerged out of the Tunisian people's profound empathy for the just Palestinian cause, as well as out of our support for the cause of justice throughout the world.

In a symbolic gesture of great meaning, a blue chair — to recall the colour of the United Nations — was designated at the Palace of Conferences in Tunisia, where the media centre of the most recent elections was based. The following slogan was raised over the chair: "Palestine — a Member of the United Nations". We hope very soon to see a genuine seat for Palestine as a sovereign State in this important international Organization.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Osman (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to express, to his country and to the Islamic Ummah alike, the deep condolences of the people and Government of the Sudan upon the death of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. Our sincere condolences go also to the victims of the earthquake in Turkey and to their families.

At the outset, my delegation aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the Group of Arab States, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

We also wish to congratulate you, Madame President, for having convened this open debate on the Middle East and the occupied Palestinian territories at a time when the international community must, more than ever, support the choice of the Palestinian people and their just and legitimate demands — beginning with the creation of an independent State of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital. The delegation of the Sudan supports the application of Palestine for full United Nations membership and urges Council members to support that legitimate request.

It is now time for the international community, represented by the United Nations and the Security

Council, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law, to create two States as a practical solution to the conflict in the occupied territories. That is especially necessary given that neither international nor regional mediation efforts, nor those of the Quartet, have succeeded in resolving the conflict.

In the light of Israel's ongoing illegal and illegitimate settlement activities aimed at distorting the facts on the ground and imposing a status quo, the Security Council is aware of the fact that those activities have expanded to East Jerusalem, where more than 1,000 colonialist housing units have been built with impunity. Also in Jerusalem, the occupation authorities are depriving the Palestinian population of their housing, going so far as to deny them construction permits to rebuild. Moreover, the Holy City is under siege by virtue of a network of settlements that has resulted in its isolation from other Palestinian cities.

The Sudan strongly condemns any Israeli policy or practice that seeks to alter the demographic composition of occupied Palestinian territories. We call upon Council members to ensure that Israel abides by its commitments under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols, as well as all of the United Nations resolutions adopted since 1948. Israel has thus far ignored all of those measures. In that context, I wish in particular to mention resolution 1860 (2009) which, inter alia, stipulates that the two parties and the international community should make every possible effort to establish a just peace and to create two States within secure and recognized borders.

It is therefore time for the Palestinian people to enjoy their legitimate and just right to establish an independent State after 63 years of suffering deprivation. We must put an end to the tragedy of millions of exiled Palestinian refugees who should be able to live in a State that is a full-fledged Member of the United Nations.

We welcome recent developments, including the prisoner exchange and the return of more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees from Israeli prisons. We appreciate the efforts made by the sisterly country of Egypt in that regard. Still, we do not forget the fact that thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees remain in Israeli prisons.

In that context, we note the ministerial statement of the Non-Aligned Movement, issued last May in Bali, calling for the immediate release of Palestinian prisoners. We also point out that those prisoners include women and children. That should be a priority issue for the Security Council and the Human Rights Council.

Finally, we recall resolution 1701 (2006), on Lebanon, and other relevant resolutions. We call on Israel to respect the provisions of those resolutions and to put an end to its continuing violations of and encroachment on Lebanon's sovereignty. We also condemn Israeli policies seeking to impose legislation and administrative structures on the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. In that context, we call on Israel to implement the Security Council's resolutions relating to the Golan, especially resolution 497 (1981), which calls for complete Israeli withdrawal from the Golan to the 4 June 1967 borders.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express our deepest condolences to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the passing of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and we ask God, in his everlasting mercy and forgiveness, to welcome him. We also express our condolences to the people and Government of Turkey for the earthquake that struck there recently.

I am honoured to address the Security Council on behalf of the Group of Arab States. I would like to congratulate you, Madame President, on your successful presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to thank you for convening this open debate and Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

Over the past decades, the Council has convened many meetings like today's, at which a large number of statements were made to confirm the importance of reaching a peaceful, just, comprehensive and sustainable solution to the Palestinian question and to achieve peace and stability in a region of great importance to international peace and security. However, the Palestinian question is still awaiting that solution, although we all know that it was proposed a long time ago and that it consists of the establishment of two independent States, living in peace side by side on the basis of the 1967 borders, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Road Map. It is time we did what we all know must be done.

More than 60 years ago in 1947, the General Assembly adopted its resolution 181 (II) on the establishment of two States in Palestine. Since then, however, Israel has only occupied more Palestinian and other Arab territories and continued to pursue repressive policies against the Palestinians, violate their inalienable rights and use excessive force against them. Despite all the efforts to hold peace talks and the support that the peace process has received, the outcome of that process remains hostage to the intransigence of the Israeli side, which has continued policies that do not express a sincere desire for peace, contradicting its claims to the contrary.

That is demonstrated by the insistence of the current Israeli Government on expanding illegal settlements in the West Bank, including building new housing units in East Jerusalem, knowing that those actions undermine the basic conditions for resuming genuine peace negotiations and that they constitute a challenge to the will of the international community, including resolutions of the Security Council.

At the same time, the Arab countries have shown a sincere desire for peace with Israel, as evidenced by the Arab Peace Initiative. The Initiative, however, has been met only with continued intransigence by successive Israeli Governments opposed to creating real conditions for a successful peace process. That pattern has led to several wasted opportunities, the most recent of which was the opportunity that arose last year after the resumption of direct peace talks between the two sides, strongly encouraged by the Government of the United States.

Today, we have a real opportunity to take a major step towards a practical solution for the Palestinian cause. It would require serious political will and the Security Council to assume its Charter responsibility for the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. The Arab Group hopes that the Palestinian demand for full membership in the United Nations, which was referred to the Council a month ago, finds support among all members of the Council and that Palestine will enjoy the Council's recommendation for full membership.

The Palestinian State has so far been formally recognized by more than 130 countries —the vast majority of States Members of this international Organization — and States continue to join the list every day. Member States are becoming aware that there is no choice but to realize the right of Palestinians to determine their own destiny and to live in dignity and security within the borders of their independent State, also given the fact that the institutions of the Palestinian Authority are ready to manage a viable State, as confirmed by relevant international organizations.

The Palestinian side has stressed that its application for membership does not necessarily mean closing the door to negotiations with the Israeli side. Indeed, we are anticipating the resumption of negotiations soon, in accordance with the call by the Quartet in its statement of 23 September (SG/2178). We underline again that the success of negotiations will hinge on putting a stop to the construction of settlements and to all repressive Israeli policies and practices towards the Palestinians, and on Israel lifting the unjust, inhumane and illegal siege imposed on the whole population of Gaza.

We stress our firm rejection of the illegal measures taken by Israel in occupied East Jerusalem and its attempts to change the Arab identity, demographic composition, legal status and religious character of the city. We stress that all such attempts are null and void and without legal effect. On the other hand, it is incumbent upon the Israeli authorities — who often speak of the need to address security and terrorism — to act to put an end to the crimes and terrorism perpetrated by some Israeli settlers, which have become intolerable.

Last week saw an agreement to exchange prisoners between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. We call for the release of all remaining detainees languishing in Israeli jails, especially minors, women, the elderly and the ill.

One obstacle to sustainable peace in the Middle East that threatens stability in our region is Israel's nuclear policy and its refusal to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency, and subject its nuclear facilities to international monitoring. The Arab Group emphasizes the importance of holding a conference to establish a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East in 2012, pursuant to the action plan adopted at the 2010 NPT Review Conference (see NPT/CONF.201050 (Vol. I)). Parallel progress must be maintained in terms of content and timing, leading to the full and total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction in the region — nuclear, chemical and biological — in accordance with the action plan. The Conference should yield concrete results on the road to achieving that goal.

The Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory and the Syrian Golan continues. Here we would like to highlight the relevant General Assembly resolutions and Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which emphasizes that the Israeli decision to annex the Syrian Golan is null and void and without legal effect. The Arab Group calls for Israel to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967 and to stop its aggressive practices, which violate international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

The Arab Group demands that the international community compel Israel to implement its obligations under resolution 1701 (2006) so as to prevent violations of Lebanese sovereignty by land, sea and air; to withdraw from the northern part of Ghajar village, Shaba'a farms and Kfar Shuba hills; and to accelerate the demarcation of the Blue Line.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.

United Nations
S/PV.6637

Security Council

Distr.: General
25 October 2011

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 6637th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 25 October 2011, at 10 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

> "At its 6637th meeting, held in private on 25 October 2011, the Security Council considered the item entitled 'Briefing by the President of the International Court of Justice'.
>
> "In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, the President extended an invitation under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure to Judge Hisashi Owada, President of the International Court of Justice.
>
> "Members of the Council and Judge Owada had an exchange of views."

Please recycle

United Nations S/PV.6638

Security Council

Sixty-sixth year

Provisional

6638th meeting

Tuesday, 25 October 2011, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Ogwu	(Nigeria)
Members:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mr. Fernandes
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Briens
	Gabon	Mr. Messone
	Germany	Mr. Berger
	India	Mr. Kumar
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Portugal	Mr. Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Agasandyan
	South Africa	Mr. Mashabane
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2011/643)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2011/643)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Sudan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2011/643, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ladsous.

Mr. Ladsous (*spoke in French*): I am pleased to be here today to brief the Council on the situation in Darfur and on the implementation of the mandate of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

Members of the Council have before them the report of the Secretary-General dated 12 October 2011 (S/2011/643). In addition, I should like to highlight some key points related to the peace process and the humanitarian and security situation in Darfur.

Progress has been achieved in the implementation of the Agreement on the adoption of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. The head of the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM), Eltigani Seisi, arrived in the Sudan on 22 October, together with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Sheikh Ahmad bin Abdullah Al-Mahmoud. On 23 October, Mr. Seisi took the oath as Chair of the Darfur Regional Authority, and the following day began a weeklong visit to Darfur, which is still under way. His arrival in the Sudan, as all are aware, was awaited in order to accelerate the next stage of the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, including, inter alia, the establishment of committees and commissions under the authority of the Darfur Regional Authority, as well as the confirmation by President Omer Al-Bashir of the LJM candidates for posts within the Regional Authority and other offices.

The intention of the parties is to rebuild the institutions established in the context of the Darfur peace process, whose operations were suspended by the Government following a breakdown in relations with the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA)-Minni Minawi earlier this year. The parties intend to integrate these elements into the committees and commissions of the Darfur Regional Authority in order to avoid any duplication or overlap.

At the fourth and fifth meetings held in El-Fasher, on 3 and 17 October, the Ceasefire Commission discussed the need for the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Liberation and Justice Movement to submit to the process of the verification of maps and information relating to the position of their forces. A subcommittee including representatives of UNAMID and the LJM was set up at the 3 October meeting to assist the LJM in producing a graphic representation of the location of its forces. The Sudanese Armed Forces have already submitted the required information, and the LJM is expected to also provide, at the next meeting of the Commission, on 31 October, a list showing the current location of its forces, so as to enable the process of the verification of all forces by UNAMID to begin.

UNAMID is helping community leaders and civil society organizations to devise a plan aimed at the dissemination of information on the Doha Document throughout Darfur. Regular contacts have been made with the actors in Darfur from 3 to 19 October. UNAMID has also held meetings in the larger camps and towns to assess the first impressions of the people with regard to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. The mission noted broad support in principle for the Document among internally displaced persons, political opposition parties, civil society organizations and local authorities. UNAMID also noted that many of them deplore the lack of support for the Doha Document by the Justice and Equality Movement, the SLA-Abdul Wahid and the SLA-Minni Minawi, and understand that the success of the Doha Document will depend to a large extent on the willingness of the Government to implement its provisions.

While we commend the first steps taken by the Government and the LJM in terms of implementing the Doha Document, we must also continue to do everything in our power to help the Sudanese people to reach an inclusive and final agreement on this conflict. As the Security Council is aware, the United Nations and the African Union are working with the parties to develop a new road map for peace in Darfur, whose aim is to put an end to hostilities and to make the peace process more inclusive.

(*spoke in English*)

Following extensive consultations between the United Nations and the African Union, as well as with the parties to the conflict and the members of the Implementation Follow-Up Commission, UNAMID presented the main elements of the road map to international partners at the fourth retreat of special envoys, held in El Geneina on 19 October. Those elements were: first, support for the implementation of the Doha Document; secondly, sustained engagement with those movements that were holding out; and thirdly, support, in principle, for internal dialogue among the people of Darfur on the peace process.

Final consultations are needed within the United Nations and the African Union, as well as with international partners, before the road map can be finalized. In addition, provision will be made for the outcome of a workshop set to take place in Washington, D.C., on 16 and 17 November to be reflected in the road map. The development of the road map as a whole will be completed by the end of the year.

At the retreat for special envoys I mentioned earlier, participants reviewed recent developments in Darfur and discussed the way forward. The retreat provided a useful forum for enhancing coordination and the engagement of the international community in the Darfur peace process. In the outcome statement of 19 October, participants, among other things, welcomed the signing of the Agreement for the Adoption of the Doha Document, took note of the progress made towards the implementation of the Agreement, and called on all parties to cease military hostilities and pursue a negotiated settlement to the conflict.

While the security situation in Darfur was relatively calm between 1 July and the end of September, it subsequently deteriorated in El Taweisha, in North Darfur, and in Nertiti, in the West, due to sporadic fighting between Government forces and armed groups. Since the issuance of the Secretary-General's report on 5 October, an unidentified armed group attacked the compound of the Nertiti Locality Commissioner. A Government police unit guarding the compound repelled the attack, and there were no reported casualties. Also in Nertiti, an unidentified armed group attacked a Sudanese Armed Forces observation post on 12 October. Again, no casualties were reported. UNAMID increased patrolling in the area and engaged community leaders, local Government officials and movement commanders to promote security and stability.

In North Darfur, an unidentified armed group attacked a Sudanese Armed Forces unit in Kroya Laban, 25 kilometres west of El Taweisha, on 6 October, killing — according to Sudanese Armed Forces sources — three of SAF soldiers and injuring nine. Local interlocutors informed UNAMID that the Sudanese Armed Forces then attacked Kroya Laban and nearby Ushandumah villages on 9 October. On 11 October, at the camp for internally displaced persons (IDP) in Neem 60 kilometres south of El Taweisha, a UNAMID verification patrol encountered approximately 80 households recently displaced from Kroya Laban and Ushandumah. The Mission is working with humanitarian agencies to ensure that these persons receive aid.

As I have mentioned, with regard to recent attacks involving UNAMID patrols, on 30 September, as a UNAMID patrol passed by a Sudanese Armed Forces position in Foro Baranga, in West Darfur, a man dressed in civilian clothing ran towards the convoy, climbed on top of a UNAMID armed personnel carrier and attempted to enter it through the top hatch. The man was being pursued and fired upon by Sudanese Armed Forces personnel, who shot him dead. Approximately 40 Sudanese Armed Forces soldiers then surrounded the convoy and took custody of the body. I have to stress that UNAMID takes such situations seriously, and an investigation into the incident, including into whether patrol members followed proper drills and procedures, is under way. The case of the person in charge is presently being scrutinized. UNAMID human rights officers are also following up with Sudanese Armed Forces authorities to investigate the circumstances that led to the victim being pursued by Government soldiers.

As I reported to the Council on 11 October during a briefing on Abyei, a UNAMID patrol was ambushed by unidentified armed men near Zam Zam camp on 10 October. Tragically, three UNAMID peacekeepers were killed and six injured. One of the attackers was also killed in the exchange of fire that ensued. A UNAMID investigation into the incident is ongoing. The investigation will aim to establish, among other things, the source of the attack and the steps that UNAMID can take to deter and enhance its response to such attacks.

In accordance with resolution 2003 (2011) and with a view to enhancing the efficiency of the operations of the Mission, the Secretary-General is planning to undertake a review of UNAMID uniformed personnel. The review will be led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on behalf of the Secretary-General, working in conjunction with the African Union, UNAMID and relevant Secretariat departments. It is our intention to undertake a comprehensive review of mission resources for mandate implementation, with, as I said, a particular focus on uniformed personnel. The Secretary-General expects to be able to provide preliminary recommendations to the Council in the first quarter of next year.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that while important progress has been made in the peace process, more work is required to reach an inclusive settlement to the conflict. It will be crucial in this regard for the signatory parties to broaden support for the Doha Document by working to ensure that peace dividends reach the people of Darfur. I therefore call on the parties to implement the DDPD faithfully and in a timely manner. I also urge international partners to support the parties' efforts in this regard.

The attainment of an inclusive settlement to the conflict also requires the Government and holdout movements to agree to cease hostilities and enter into dialogue. The effects of clashes like those in Nertiti and El Taweisha show that protection and humanitarian challenges will remain so long as the Sudanese Armed Forces and armed groups engage each other militarily. I call on those parties that have not yet done so to cease hostilities and enter into peace negotiations immediately and without precondition.

In addition, UNAMID peacekeepers and aid workers continue to face serious risks in Darfur. Of course, I strongly condemn those responsible for the cowardly attack on our peacekeepers at Zam Zam. I call on the Government to fully investigate the incident and to spare no effort in bringing those responsible to justice. I also call on the Government to fully investigate the 30 September shooting incident in Foro Baranga.

The continued support of the Council remains vital to enabling UNAMID to improve the security situation in Darfur, support the delivery of aid and advance the peace process. Despite the challenges, the many dedicated women and men of UNAMID are contributing to the creation of a more secure environment for civilians, safer humanitarian operations and more inclusive peace process in what remain very difficult and demanding circumstances.

The President: I thank Mr. Ladsous for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Osman (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to reiterate our congratulations to you, Madame, as you prepare to conclude your presidency of the Security Council for this month, having organized a programme ripe with momentous issues related to the maintenance of international peace and security.

On behalf of the Government and the people of the Sudan, I extend our condolences to the peoples and Governments of Rwanda and Senegal for the three soldiers who were killed in the attack carried out by the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi against a convoy of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) near the Zam Zam camp in a desperate attempt to stifle the positive impetus and considerable support enjoyed by the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur.

I should also like to thank Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his briefing on the situation in Darfur.

We are inspired with hope by the fact that today's deliberations on the Secretary-General's report on UNAMID (S/2011/643) are taking place only two days after the appointment Mr. Eltigani Seisi, the head of the Liberation and Justice Movement who signed the

Doha Document, as Chair of the Darfur Regional Authority. Earlier, Al Haj Adam Youssef, an outstanding leader and son of Darfur, was appointed Second Vice-President of the Republic of the Sudan.

The Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, signed on 14 July 2011, is not merely a traditional peace agreement. Rather, it reflects an integrated vision to address all of the Darfuris' demands and aspirations. All the Council members have followed the heavy turnout and broad participation by all sections and factions of Darfuri society. The Sudanese stakeholders conference was held in Doha in the framework of this Document. In addition there was engagement by the tribal chiefs as symbols of the civil administration, civil society youth organizations and women in Darfur.

Immediately after the signing of the Document we began with robust resolve the first phase of its implementation by earmarking $2 billion annually towards projects for recovery, development and reconstruction, including rehabilitation of the villages and to facilitate voluntary return and stability for the internally displaced persons.

Contrary to previous times, the temporary Darfuri authorities will now have their venue in Darfur and not in Khartoum. By virtue of the provisions of the agreement, the Authority enjoys a broad mandate with respect to the needs and demands of its people, who are a dear part of our people in the Sudan.

Despite the fact that all the citizens of Darfur fully opted in favour of peace and agreed to the Doha Peace Document, peace continues to have enemies among those who prefer to profit from the situation of their people in Darfur.

Although the Doha Document comprehensively addressed the root causes of the conflict, as stated in paragraph 2 of the report before the Council, leaders of some movements have refused to accede to the march of peace and have instead entered into conspiratorial alliances with some parties that have nothing whatsoever to do with the Darfur question. They have stated their adoption of military action as the sole option to topple the Government. That has showed that the Government is more interested in achieving peace and stability and in responding to the demands of the Darfuris than are those movements that have appointed themselves as custodians over the Darfuris, without any right or any legitimate or national democratic elections in the region.

Yet despite that, the Doha Document did not close the door in their face. Rather it called on those movements to join the peace train and to sign the Agreement. Rather than making use of the time limit set for joining the peace train, those movements entered into conspiratorial alliances with the outlawed parties from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)-North. In Kaoda, South Kordofan, they signed an agreement in which they promised to topple the Government by military action. That alone constitutes a dangerous threat to the Government of the fledgling sisterly Government of South Sudan, because the rebel movements in Darfur are attempting to deter the peace, stability and security so highly needed by the sisterly State of South Sudan. We fear that this may lead to a weakening of the State whose success we all hope for.

That was the response of the rebel movements to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. Therefore, we expect the Council to take the requisite measures towards those who impede the achievement of peace and stability. This is particularly so since the Council's resolution emphasized its resolve to take such measures.

With respect to UNAMID's important role in Darfur, my delegation reiterates its full commitment to cooperate with the mission and to facilitate its task in the framework of its mandate, according to the resolution by which it was established.

At the same time, we would emphasize the need for coordination between the mission and the provincial authorities in Darfur with regard to the time and the manner of managing security, administrative and logistical affairs in order to avoid the possibility of such regrettable incidents as the one that happened in the Zam Zam camp, where three or four peacekeeper guests were victims. It was carried out by the rebel faction led by Minni Arko Minawi. That incident would never have taken place had there been coordination with the mission under the agreement not to run patrols at night and to abide by requirements of prior notification to the relevant authorities.

The report before the Council has clearly indicated in paragraph 20, in the section on the security situation, that skirmishes between Government forces and armed movements have decreased. From time to time residual armed groups undertake certain violations, plundering, armed robbery and theft in a manner that requires our armed forces to intervene to impose the rule of law and to protect civilians.

With respect to the contents of the report, in particular the allegations of restrictions that impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance to some areas, we would like to clarify certain important elements to the Council.

Some personnel of humanitarian organizations have occasionally travelled directly to the site where they intend to work without acquiring internal travel permits beforehand. When they reach the site, they are asked to show such permits. Security and police officials then have no other option but to send them back in order to obtain the required approval. That must not be interpreted as impeding the movement of personnel of humanitarian organizations. Rather, it is a shortcoming that must be blamed on the personnel of those organizations. A high-level committee that includes Government, United Nations and humanitarian representatives is the mechanism with responsibility for ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance and removing obstacles to that end.

In addition, from time to time, security assessments are carried out and United Nations staff and humanitarian personnel are instructed not to travel to a given area. This is first and foremost in order to ensure their safety and to prevent kidnappings, as have taken place in the past. It is done out of my Government's concern, which should be appreciated.

With regard to entry visas for mission personnel, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is well aware of the fact that in recent weeks we have asked it repeatedly to provide us with a specific list of persons requiring visas. We continue to await such a list.

I would now like to address an important issue concerning visas. In consultation with the leadership of UNAMID, we concluded that we should prioritize the recruitment of Arabic-speaking police personnel. There is a genuine communication problem between mission police and the citizens of Darfur. Joint Chief Mediator Ibrahim Gambari has made some progress in that regard in the process of the periodic rotation of formed police units. The Council has agreed on the need for Arabic-speaking police personnel in a society whose language is Arabic and with whom there is a need for communication and to provide them services.

In conclusion, having begun the practical implementation of the Doha Document for Peace, it is our hope that UNAMID will pay greater attention to the other aspects of its mandate pertaining to development and reconciliation, with a view to implementing the provisions of the Document.

The meeting between mission officials and various Council members, the meeting of Darfur representatives with many members of the Council and the meetings held in Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, with the Government of the Sudan from 19 to 20 October all point to the extent to which stability and peace are entrenched in West Darfur. The meeting with the Government of the Sudan illustrates its cooperation in bringing an end to what remains of the conflict.

The development efforts we look forward to in the next phase through the contributions of the international community — in particular donors, international financial institutions and United Nations agencies — in support of the Doha Document will enable Darfur's citizens to achieve stability and to live normal lives.

Finally, I wish Under-Secretary-General Ladsous every success on his upcoming trip to the Sudan to meet with senior officials on all aspects pertaining to the situation in Darfur and UNAMID.

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.

United Nations

S/PV.6639

Security Council

Sixty-sixth year

Provisional

6639th meeting

Wednesday, 26 October 2011, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Ogwu	(Nigeria)
Members:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Messone
	Germany	Mr. Berger
	India	Mr. Manjeev Singh Puri
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Sangqu
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in Libya

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Libya

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Libya to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Ian Martin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Ian Martin.

Mr. Martin: On Sunday, I had the great privilege of representing the Secretary-General at Libya's declaration of liberation in Benghazi, the city where the popular movement had begun on February 17. A peaceful movement, sparked on that day by the demand of families to know the fate of their loved ones who had disappeared in a notorious prison massacre, was met with lethal repression, and civilians across Libya took up arms in a revolution to end decades of denial of political freedoms, human rights violations, corruption and social inequality.

The declaration brings to a close a long and painful chapter in the history of Libya. Four decades of brutal dictatorship and autocratic government have tragically wasted the potential of an entire generation as well as immense opportunities and resources that could have been invested in creating a prosperous, modern nation-State.

The declaration thus marks a new beginning for the people of Libya. While expectations must be managed, the aspirations of its youth and the sacrifices they have made must guide the next phase of Libya's transformation.

We should remind ourselves that achieving liberation has come at a huge cost, both in terms of those who have died or been maimed and in terms of the damage to cities and towns that bore the worst of the fighting, in particular Misrata, Zawiya, Bani Walid and Sirte. Nor should we forget the still volatile security situation in parts of the south of Libya, with tensions related to a complex mix of ethnic and political loyalties in previously marginalized areas with limited presence of the State.

The path to national reconciliation and healing must begin by recognizing the suffering of all Libyan people during the course of the eight-month conflict and by addressing their needs to allow them to rebuild their lives.

Several weeks ago, amid the widespread international recognition of the National Transitional Council (NTC) and the clear indications that it had the support of the overwhelming majority of Libyans, the Secretary-General called on the remaining supporters of the former regime to cease fighting. Regrettably, in Sirte, Bani Walid and Sabha, they did not do so, and the final weeks of conflict added to the toll of deaths, serious injuries, civilian suffering, displacement and destruction.

We called on all sides to respect human rights as the battles neared their end and issued appeals in support of those of the NTC itself that there should be no revenge, even against those responsible for war crimes and other grave violations. We hoped that Muammar Al-Qadhafi and others with the heaviest responsibility for such crimes would be captured and brought to justice.

However, Muammar and Motassim Al-Qadhafi were mistreated and killed in circumstances that require investigation, and there are other disturbing reports that killings amounting to war crimes were committed on both sides in the final battle for Sirte. Such killings were contrary to the orders of the National Transitional Council, and we welcome the Council's announcement of an investigation.

These killings are also within the scope of the international commission of inquiry mandated by the Human Rights Council. The period covered by the commission's mandate begins only in February this year and so does not extend to the myriad human rights violations in the period since Muammar Al-Qadhafi took power in 1969. Nonetheless, the commission will have a heavy task. The evidence has mounted of deliberate killings of prisoners by the Al-Qadhafi regime during the conflict, including in its last days in Tripoli, as well as some abuses by the revolutionary fighters.

Meanwhile, the whereabouts of the other two persons indicted by the International Criminal Court, Saif al-Islam Al-Qadhafi and Abdullah al-Senussi, remain uncertain. It is the responsibility of the NTC to ensure that, if captured inside Libya, they are treated in accordance with international humanitarian law, and it is the responsibility of all signatories to the Rome Statute to ensure that they are arrested and brought before the International Criminal Court.

I have previously informed the Council of the preparations by United Nations humanitarian agencies for the end of hostilities by pre-positioning relief supplies near to the final areas of conflict. The Deputy Special Representative and Humanitarian Coordinator was in Sirte on Monday, opening the way for missions to that city and to Bani Walid, which have just taken place. They report that current levels of stockpiling are considered adequate to provide immediate response, including food, non-food items and potable water. Priorities are the restoration of electricity and water services, rapid clean-up of explosive remnants of war and the rehabilitation of accommodation for returning residents. Destruction of buildings is severe, and housing will be a serious issue and a factor constraining return. The NTC has highlighted its concern on this issue and is looking at various solutions in coordination with international partners.

The Libyan people have demonstrated exceptional resilience and a strong capacity for meeting most humanitarian needs of the population in areas affected by the conflict. To support them, the Humanitarian Coordinator has taken steps to ensure that residual needs of vulnerable groups will still be met while the overall humanitarian effort in Libya is winding down.

From Sirte, the Humanitarian Coordinator again expressed our concern for the safe return of civilians to their towns of origin. Monitoring and advocacy with central and local authorities to ensure the protection of groups perceived by Libyans to have supported the previous regime during the conflict will continue, in support of national reconciliation efforts.

With the end of the Al-Qadhafi era, the new Libya can move forward to build a modern nation-State based on the principles embraced by the revolution — democracy, human rights, the rule of law, accountability, respect for minority rights, the empowerment of women and the promotion of civil society — while addressing the past through proper judicial and truth-seeking processes. Despite violations committed in the heat of battle, I believe that the leadership of the NTC is indeed committed, as the declaration of liberation re-emphasized, to avoiding revenge, achieving reconciliation and overcoming the manipulation of tribalism and regionalism — which the former dictator promoted to entrench his own power — thereby ensuring that the past will not be repeated.

With Sunday's declaration of liberation, the clock has started running on commitments the National Transitional Council made in its constitutional declaration. First, an interim Government must be established within 30 days, and the challenge is to form an administration that is inclusive and also possesses the expertise to be able to lead and deliver on key sectors, including public security, basic services, the economy and financial management. Then, within the first 90 days, it will be necessary to adopt electoral legislation and establish an electoral management body, and within 240 days elections for a national congress must be held to give democratic legitimacy to a new Government and the body that will draft a constitution.

Here, the task is not solely or even primarily technical, despite the challenge of mounting Libya's first election in over 45 years. First and foremost, what is needed is to engage in a broad consultation, including with civil society, that will build consensus regarding the electoral system for this first election and on other key issues to be determined in electoral legislation, and to establish an electoral management body whose independence and integrity cannot be disputed from any quarter.

Since the very beginning of its mandate, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), supported by two visits from the Director of the Electoral Assistance Division of the Secretariat's Department of Political Affairs, has been engaging closely with members of the NTC and with its legal and political subcommittees on the electoral process, in particular with respect to the electoral law and the future electoral management body. Our meetings with civil society have made clear their determination to be engaged closely in the ongoing discussions on the electoral law and in efforts to promote civic education. Work has also started on defining the framework for developing the voter register.

Our engagement will intensify as the NTC clarifies the designation of responsibilities for electoral matters. We are encountering high expectations of the United Nations, which is overwhelmingly seen as the key guarantor of the integrity of the electoral process, although it is the Libyans who must reach agreement with respect to the electoral system and other essential elements of electoral legislation.

In Benghazi and Tripoli, the liberation ceremonies included public commitments and the first handovers of weapons by the armed groups. While symbolic and limited in nature, these handovers have sent a public message that the issue is at the top of the agenda for the NTC and the forthcoming Government. There is broad consensus on the need to remove immediately all heavy weaponry from city centres, to be followed later with moves to collect light arms. Equally important is the need for a gradual redeployment of brigades away from population centres, in parallel with putting in place agreed mechanisms to provide security in major cities and towns.

There have been some positive developments in Tripoli under the authority of the Supreme Security Committee established by the NTC in coordination with the Ministries of Interior and Defence. We expect that ministers in the new Government will build upon those developments. Their challenge will be to rapidly develop opportunities for the future of combatants, making available to them support for returning to normal civilian life, or integrating them into a professional police force and national army.

In my last briefing, I highlighted the terrible legacy of the extraordinary quantity of weaponry and munitions on which the Al-Qadhafi regime squandered the wealth of Libya, to the benefit only of diverse arms suppliers and now to the menace of Libya and its region. UNSMIL continues to facilitate coordination among the Libyan authorities, relevant international organizations — including the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) — and Member States offering assistance regarding chemical weapons and nuclear materials, as well as other non-conventional weapons.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other Government focal points, together with UNSMIL, are providing assistance for visits in the near future of OPCW inspectors and the IAEA. While NTC forces appear to be controlling all relevant chemical and nuclear material sites, centralized command and control remains a concern. It has become clearer that there are additional sites with previously undeclared chemical weapons or materials, which the Government is about to declare formally to the OPCW.

Under the Al-Qadhafi regime, Libya accumulated the largest known stockpile of shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, known as man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), of any non-MANPADS-producing country. Thousands were destroyed during NATO operations. However, I must report to the Council that we have increasing concerns over the looting and likely proliferation of MANPADS, as well as large numbers of munitions and all sorts of mines, which have the most serious potential local and regional implications. International partners have been working with the Ministry of Defence on identifying MANPADS sites and storage areas, primarily in the eastern part of Libya. Hundreds of suspected sites still need to be visited.

Moreover, the prevalence of newly laid mines, in particular around Zintan, Brega and Ajdabiya, but also in parts of the Nafusa mountains, remains a great concern. Mine action, and its immediate funding, is a key priority for the United Nations. Large quantities of unexploded ordnance and ammunition stockpiles in Sirte and Bani Walid need immediate attention. In Tripoli, many stockpiles are suspected in residential areas, including in schools and hospitals, where they seem to be have been moved by Al-Qadhafi forces to conceal them from airstrikes, and most of them remain unsecured.

The flow of weapons across borders is naturally a major anxiety for Libya's neighbours and beyond, but the implications of events in Libya for the region also include the outflow of people — not only migrant workers, but also armed elements from the former regime — and concerns for those third-country nationals who remain. Together with the African Union, the United Nations will work with Libya's neighbours to support them in addressing those issues.

Inside Libya, the NTC has taken steps towards transferring responsibility for detainees from the brigades to proper State authorities, but much remains to be done to regularize detention, prevent abuse and review cases to bring about the early release of those whose detention should not be prolonged. This week, UNSMIL's first human rights advisers will begin to add their efforts to those of humanitarian agencies by recommending and advising on actions to address this urgent priority. We will be following up on the visit of senior officials of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights by offering comments on draft transitional justice legislation, recommending broad consultations with civil society and trying to mobilize assistance for the hard-pressed National Commission on Missing Persons.

Once the new interim Government has been formed and has put in place its mechanisms to coordinate international assistance, we will discuss with it how to go forward with a coordinated, Libyan-led needs assessment process. Many international actors stand ready to assist, but the authorities rightly insist that it is for Libyans to set the framework and to lead, and they continue to tell us that they wish the United Nations to be their key partner in coordinating international assistance.

Less than six weeks into the mandate of UNSMIL, our 36 international staff in Libya include experts in the priority areas in which we have been asked to assist. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has formally handed over to us a compound of offices that is very suitable for our Mission headquarters, and mission support staff are working hard to make it ready for use as soon as possible. We expect that preliminary discussions will enable a status-of-mission agreement to be formalized soon after the interim Government takes office. That will also be the time when we will be able to begin detailed discussions on the longer-term role and requirements for UNSMIL. We will report to the Council on the next steps as the situation becomes clearer, but given the delays to date, it seems likely that we will have to request an extension of the initial three-month UNSMIL mandate for a further few months so as to have time for that assessment.

With liberation now completed, the challenges facing the Libyan people and the new incoming Government will nonetheless be extraordinary. It will be critical, therefore, for the international community to remain focused and measured in our engagement with the Libyan authorities during this transition period, while closely following their sense of immediate priorities and not attempting to impose over-ambitious expectations or longer-term programmes.

When I and my colleagues listen to NTC members, Government officials and civil society, the priorities identified are the same. In addition to security and elections, which have already been mentioned, they include public financial management, including the urgent preparation of a budget for 2012, new rules to ensure fiscal transparency and the clarification of liquidity requirements.

Also a key priority is the beginning of a national reconciliation process and a coherent approach, led by the NTC, to all human rights and transitional justice issues that have surfaced in recent weeks and that will be challenges in the months to come.

Above all, we must support the NTC in handling the difficult political processes involved in implementing the road map contained in the constitutional declaration and in managing the inevitably increasing socio-economic expectations of the Libyan people.

When a country that has been denied the development of so many of the institutions of an effective democratic State faces challenges of such enormity, it would be easy to make a case for pessimism. Indeed, it would be foolish to expect the path ahead to be smooth and easy.

However, Libyans justly point to what extent they have already surprised us, and perhaps themselves, in what they have achieved. They have done so with an extraordinary display of civic responsibility and initiative by women and men, and especially by their youth. They may seek from us lessons in the details of democracy, but they can offer lessons in its spirit. They express repeated gratitude to the United Nations for the action this Council took in its resolutions 1970 (2011) and 1973 (2011) and to NATO and the non-NATO countries that acted under that mandate, but they are proud that they made their revolution and are determined to maintain their sovereignty in building their future. They trust the United Nations to support the process that they intend to lead, and it is for us to fulfil their expectations.

The President: I thank Mr. Martin for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Libya.

Mr. Dabbashi (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to congratulate you, Madame President, on your leadership of the Council's proceedings for this month. As a matter of fact, I am delighted to see a dear friend and representative of a sisterly African State presiding over the affairs of the Council.

Allow me to extend our thanks to the Secretary-General, all members of the Security Council and all States that stood by the side of Libya and the Libyan people over the course of the past several months, during which we were experiencing a painful plight.

On 20 October Libya declared its liberation from the dictatorial regime of Colonel Al-Qadhafi following his assassination, which was announced on 23 October.

Here, I would like to convey the gratitude of the Libyan people to all those who contributed to their support, whether by supplying weaponry, food or medicine, or by caring for the injured, as well as to those who participated in imposing the no-fly zone and in protecting civilians. Had it not been for that solidarity with the Libyan people, and the assistance we received, we could not have done what we have done, and the number of victims would have been much higher than it is.

If I may, I should say that despite the admirable action on the part of the international alliance in imposing the no-fly zone and protecting civilians — which the Libyan people strongly commend — we as a people abhor any interference in our sovereignty and consider that any foreign presence in our skies diminishes that sovereignty, while understanding that it was unavoidable and indispensable. The Libyan people feel that every day that passes with foreign control over our skies infringes on our sovereignty. This has been particularly true since 23 October, when we made our declaration of liberation.

I would therefore like to inform everyone that the Libyan people are looking forward to terminating as soon as possible the no-fly zone over Libya and the mandate on the protection of civilians set out in resolution 1973 (2011). According to our original assessment, 31 October would be the logical date on which to terminate the mandate.

However, there is no official resolution by the National Transitional Council (NTC), and some contradictory news militates against that. Also, some believe that we need further evaluation of the country's security situation and the extent of Libya's ability to monitor its borders. Therefore we would like to ask that the Security Council allow the NTC to take a resolution on this subject to be officially conveyed to the Council. That will take a few days. It may still take place before the 31st of this month.

However, as the Council is aware, Libya is a huge country, and we have not yet activated our air capability. The people have been criticizing the NTC for the delay in re-establishing the national armed forces, since they are the only force that can maintain our security and monitor our borders, besides protecting our citizens. We therefore wish to request that the Council not adopt a resolution hastily. We will certainly inform the Council of the NTC's official decision, which we hope we will have before the end of the month.

With our declaration of liberation, we have launched a new phase in Libya's history in which we look forward to a democratic Libya that respects human rights, preserves citizens' fundamental freedoms, believes in pluralism, looks forward to the future and will not be held back by the past, and looks for equal and balanced relations with its neighbours and all States of the world. This will be a difficult stage, particularly in a State like ours, which has no institutions. Besides the support we had from the international community in our struggle to topple the dictatorship, we will also need its backing in the future in building a democratic State, development, reconstruction and achieving prosperity for our people.

Much has been said about violations of human rights, particularly concerning the way in which Muammar Al-Qadhafi died or was killed. I would like to declare that we will not tolerate any violations of human rights. We all know the extent of the hatred that controlled the minds of Libyans under the Al-Qadhafi regime, the result of the horrific acts he perpetrated against our people. However, if we discover that there were any infringements of the rights of Al-Qadhafi or any others, their perpetrators must be punished.

According to initial inquiries and information, Al-Qadhafi was injured during clashes between his loyalists and the rebels. When he was arrested, he was bleeding from his abdomen and head; he died on arrival at the hospital in Misrata. According to preliminary reports, none of the revolutionaries fired on him after arresting him. An independent commission of inquiry has been set up, and its findings will be made public after the investigation is completed.

With regard to United Nations efforts, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ian Martin, for his valuable and comprehensive briefing. He has outlined clearly what the Libyan people will need in the way of assistance from the United Nations in the future.

Undoubtedly, it will be very difficult for the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) to begin its work at this time, as we are in the process of forming the transitional Government. However, the transitional Government will be set up soon — sometime in the next two weeks. That will make it possible and easier for the Mission to work in cooperation with all Libyan sectors and entities. In addition, there will be a specific department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs charged with facilitating the work of UNSMIL.

Of course, we require the assistance of the United Nations and its experts at this critical stage. We will return to the Council shortly to inform it of the official decision of the NTC with regard to the mandate, in accordance with resolution 1973 (2011) on the protection of civilians and the no-fly zone.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.6640

Security Council *Provisional*
Sixty-sixth year

6640th meeting

Thursday, 27 October 2011, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Ogwu	(Nigeria)
Members:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Messone
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	India	Mr. Kumar
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Sangqu
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in Libya

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Libya

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Libya to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2011/669, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Germany, Lebanon, Nigeria, Portugal, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, China, Colombia, France, Gabon, Germany, India, Lebanon, Nigeria, Portugal, Russian Federation, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President: There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2016 (2011).

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council will remain seized of the matter.

The meeting rose at 10.20 a.m.